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The New Criterion

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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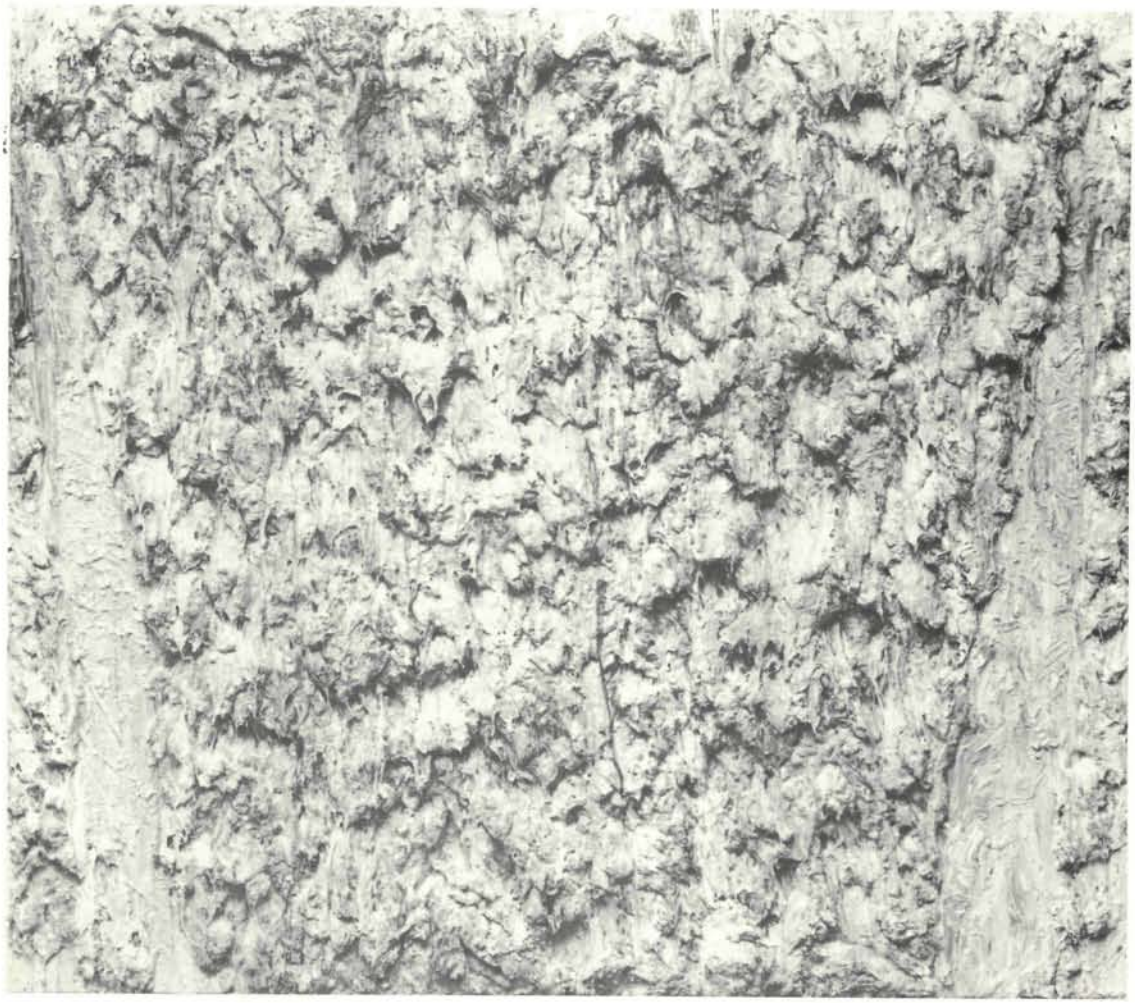

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Dick Allen's most recent book of poems is *Overnight in the Guest House of the Mystic.*

Louis Auchincloss's most recent novels are *The Book Class* and *Honorable Men.* A new novel, *Diary of a Yuppie,* will be published by Houghton Mifflin this fall.

Bruce Bawer reviewed Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* in the May issue of *The New Criterion.*

James Gardner wrote on Italo Calvino for the December 1985 issue of *The New Criterion.*

Eric Gibson reviews current exhibitions for *The New Criterion* and *Studio International.*

Dan Hofstadter wrote on Atget's photographs for the December 1985 issue of *The New Criterion.*

Donald Justice's latest book of poems is *Selected Poems.* He teaches at the University of Florida.

Roger Kimball wrote on the PBS series "Pride of Place" for the May issue of *The New Criterion.*

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Writing the history of the New York intellectuals

by Hilton Kramer

Of the writing of books and articles about the history of the New York intellectuals there appears to be no end. Every day now brings its expected parcel of new reading matter (if not exactly new information) on the arguments which once raged in the pages of *Partisan Review, Commentary, Encounter,* and sundry other small-circulation journals, and in the personal histories of the principal protagonists in a story that must be as familiar—in some quarters at least—as the history of the Kennedys. How many times, after all, does the saga of City College in the Thirties or of *Partisan*'s break with the Communist Party or of the turns and counter-turns in *Commentary*'s political outlook have to be recounted before we have been made to feel that the subject is exhausted and should now be retired? Is there really anything new to be learned from or about this remarkable chapter in American history?

Apparently there is. Certainly there is no shortage of writers who think so, and more and more of them are coming forward to stake their claims and offer their views. And while there are grounds for doubting that very many of them will have much to tell us that we don't already know, this does not mean that the story has been adequately told or that the lessons to be learned from it have been clearly understood. Far from it. Much remains to be explained and accounted for. Certain members of the group—Lionel Abel, William Barrett, Irving Howe, Irving Kristol, William Phillips, and Norman Podhoretz—have published their memoirs, and others—Sidney Hook, Mary McCarthy, and Diana Trilling—are known to be writing theirs. But memoirs—important and interesting as they may sometimes be—are not history, and despite the flow of copy devoted to the New York intellectuals, their history cannot yet be said to have been written.

What we can be fairly certain of, however, is the reason why so much attention is being paid, and will continue to be paid, to this subject. The issues that were of primary concern to the New York intellectuals from the Thirties onward—namely, Marxism in politics and modernism in culture—are still, in one form or another, the central political and cultural issues of the present day, and they affect a larger part of our society than ever before. The way these issues were argued thirty or forty or fifty years ago; the divisions they caused, the loyalties they engendered, and the positions that resulted from them; above all, the fate that this movement met with in the upheavals of the Sixties, and the changes which followed from that—the whole intellectual dynamic of this complicated history has turned out, for better or for worse, to have played a considerable role in shaping our institutions and setting the agenda for a great deal that remains under intense debate today. On many matters that are now of urgent concern in the Eighties there is simply no way of grasping their rudiments without some

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knowledge of this antecedent history. There is no way, for example, that one can intelligently read the intellectual press today—or, for that matter, follow the part of the popular media which concerns itself with matters of intellectual debate—in isolation from this history. On subjects as diverse as Nicaragua, the Museum of Modern Art, the fate of contemporary music, or the study of the humanities in the universities, what is now being thought and implemented as policy is likely to have its roots in this particular aspect of the past.

For many people, of course, it is extremely irksome—if not something worse—to be reminded that these and many other current issues have an intellectual history which bears directly on the ideas we now hold (whatever our position) and even on the language with which these ideas are expressed. They would much prefer to forget the past—most especially (need one add?) the mistakes of the past. The amnesiac impulse, though always selective, exerts a tremendous appeal, allowing those so inclined to deny or erase all traces of the old arguments or, what comes to the same thing, to rewrite them in a way that conforms to current orthodoxies. To be told that these orthodoxies are themselves, more often than not, a reconstructed residue of the old arguments is, understandably, an affront to intellectual dignity and a blow to the pride many take in representing a generation that is unencumbered (as it pleases them to believe) by the burden of history. But to ignore or deny the past is not, finally, a viable option for a serious mind. The past must be faced if the present is to be understood, and except for those who prefer to dwell in the realm of fantasy—no small number, alas, in today's intellectual world—there is no escaping the fact. Many try, of course. But theirs is the fate of those who are condemned to repeat what they have forgotten or denied.

As history, then, the story of the New York intellectuals makes its primary claim on us for the reason I have stated: it was in their identification of Marxism in politics and modernism in culture as the dominant ideas of the age that they set the agenda which has governed intellectual debate to a larger and larger extent ever since. Today, to be sure, there are many more versions of Marxist doctrine to conjure with in the realm of intellectual discourse than even the most faction-hardened New York intellectual of the Thirties or Forties would have had any reason to anticipate—some versions, indeed, so widely accepted and respectable that it is in the interest of those who foster them to deny they are Marxist at all—and the discussion of modernism has likewise been splintered and rendered problematical by the assaults launched upon it in the name of postmodernism. However much our understanding of both Marxism and modernism has been altered by these changes, the ideas identified by the New York intellectuals as dominant remain so, and this is what makes our current historical experience continuous with theirs.

Why, given the importance of this development, it has proved to be so difficult to establish a credible and comprehensive account of what the history of this group actually consisted of, is another question. Part (though only part) of the answer to this question is to be found, I believe, in the very thing that makes this chapter of our history so remarkable: the fact that a social phenomenon originally seen to be so marginal has proved in the course of time to be so central. The New York intellectuals were at the outset, after all, a powerless and isolated coterie in a nation that was long said to have no use for the intellectual vocation and to be contemptuous of and indifferent to its aspirations—and said, moreover, most vociferously by the intellectuals in question. That these same intellectuals, or at least the ideas by which they are known, should now loom so large on the historical horizon is a development difficult for many to grasp—though apparently easy enough for a multitude of outsiders to resent. For to grasp this change and really understand it means, at the very least, that one has to revise certain notions

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about the relation of ideas to social reality in a bourgeois democracy like our own—notions that were inherited from the New York intellectuals themselves. This revisionist project was one of the tasks which Lionel Trilling had undertaken to pursue in some of his most important writings, and he wasn't thanked for it by certain other New York intellectuals who suspected—correctly, I think—that it amounted to a kind of defense of bourgeois society.

Least of all, then, in the case of those writers for whom radical sentiment remained a badge of virtue even when they had abandoned radical politics, was it easy for the New York intellectuals themselves to accept this situation. While enthusiastically embracing the rewards which their new status brought them—professorships in the universities, staff jobs on *The New Yorker,* and the loving attention of the media—they were nonetheless haunted by the specter of the radical vocation and possessed by the rhetoric it had bequeathed to them. Which is why the political and cultural upheavals of the Sixties represented such a crisis for the New York intellectuals, and in fact marked the termination of their movement. Whether or not they still professed to be radicals or were openly opposed to the Left or were becalmed somewhere in between, the New York intellectuals belonged unmistakably to the bourgeois establishment as far as the new radicals of the Sixties were concerned. In this judgment, at least, the ideologues of the New Left were not mistaken. By the Sixties the New York intellectuals had become, intellectually as well as socially, thoroughly bourgeoisified, and there was something comical, if also something touching and even tragic, in the desperate attempts that were made to disguise the fact. The spectacle of Harold Rosenberg dressing up his encomiums to abstract art in the language of radical opposition for the readers of *The New Yorker* long after the bourgeoisie had clasped this art to its bosom, like the spectacle of Philip Rahv emerging from his townhouse on Beacon Street in Boston to play the born-again Leninist, did nothing to alter the fact that the romance of the New York intellectuals with the radical Left had come to an inglorious end. If the intellectual Left now prospered in a way that hadn't been equaled since the Thirties, it was under the leadership of a very different kind of mentality—or perhaps one should say, *mentalité.* As exemplars of the radical vision, the New York intellectuals had been rendered superfluous. Thenceforth, whatever real intellectual energy remained to individual survivors of this group was directed elsewhere—specifically, to a critique of the Marxist analysis of capitalist society and culture which the New York intellectuals had initiated in their heyday but about which they had long been deeply divided.

If the new radicalism of the Sixties marked *finis* to the history of the New York intellectuals as a movement, setting them in fact in open opposition to each other, it also inaugurated the period in which the history of the group would begin to be written. It is for this reason, above all, that attempts to write this history have so far proven to be so unsatisfactory. For on this subject, as on others, the historiography spawned by the radicalism of the Sixties looks back to the Thirties for its inspiration and its standards, and thus looks upon the Forties and the Fifties—the years when the New York intellectuals made their greatest and most enduring contribution to political and cultural criticism—as a period of betrayal and apostasy. It naturally follows from this reading of history that to have taken up the cause of American democracy in the Cold War, as the New York intellectuals mainly did; to have believed in the guilt of Hiss and the Rosenbergs, as they also mainly did; and to have opposed the expansionist policies of the Soviet Union, as they virtually all did; to have done such things, and not under duress but as the result of a deep and hard-earned understanding of what Communism represented in the modern world, is to be accused now of selling out the radical dream in the interest of personal advancement and craven opportunism. It tells us much about the

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intellectual temper of the times, at least as it has come to be entrenched in the universities, that not a single historian has come forward to write the history of the New York intellectuals from a perspective that is sympathetic to and understanding of their principled opposition to totalitarianism and their vigorous defense of high culture against the depredations of political corruption and commercial debasement. By and large, the history of the New York intellectuals—not the memoirs but the history—is being written from the perspective of the Left, with its touchstones of intellectual probity and achievement drawn from the "idealism" of the Sixties and the political and cultural myths of the Thirties.

This is certainly the case with the latest contribution to the literature of the subject—Alexander Bloom's *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World.*[1] Professor Bloom, who teaches history at Wheaton College, is not, to be sure, your garden-variety left-wing militant. (Such militants don't write books of this sort; they have other fish to fry.) He isn't vicious or vindictive or even very polemical. If anything, he is genial to a fault, and altogether pleased with his subject. What he is, in other words, is your quintessential liberal academic. He is not given to billboarding his Sixties ideology; he simply assumes, without argument and as a matter of course, that it is from the perspective of the Sixties that the history of the New York intellectuals must now be written. In this assumption he is entirely representative of his academic generation, and it is as a product of the regnant liberal academy—rather than as an account of its subject—that his book makes its principal claim on our attention.

Prodigal Sons seems to have originated as a doctoral dissertation in the Seventies. Most of the interviews from which Professor Bloom quotes throughout the book appear to have been conducted between 1976 and 1979, and from internal evidence I would guess that the bulk of the manuscript was probably completed some five or more years ago and had to be hastily patched up on its way to the printers. (Although he mentions Lillian Hellman's lawsuit against Mary McCarthy on the last page of the text, for example, Hellman's death in 1984 just barely makes it into the notes.) About some of his sources, moreover, he is trusting to the point of naïveté, as this writer has reason to know. Discussing the journal called *Modern Occasions,* which Philip Rahv started after his break with *Partisan Review,* Professor Bloom writes:

> A less-than-glowing analysis of Lionel Trilling by Mark Krupnick, in the second number, prompted the resignation of Hilton Kramer, who had written a "New York Letter" in the first issue. Rahv greeted this, Krupnick recalled[,] with "a delightful snort and some choice remarks about petty-bourgeois fetishists of culture."

Now in the history of the New York intellectuals, this episode can scarcely be said to be even a footnote, but Professor Bloom manages, all the same, to get even this minor and easily verified matter entirely wrong. I couldn't have "resigned" from *Modern Occasions* because I never had any position with the journal. I had simply written an article for it. (Rahv had asked me to serve as managing editor, but I refused.) I did write a letter protesting Krupnick's article, but Rahv's reply, while extremely vicious about Trilling, was very cordial to me.[2] I am not suggesting, by the way, that Krupnick misrepresented the episode; he no doubt reported Rahv's comments to *him* correctly. And Krupnick has gone on, in any case, to

1 *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World* by Alexander Bloom. Oxford University Press, 461 pages $24.95.

2 Rahv concluded his letter to me (March 8, 1971) as follows: "It was good of you . . . to write me as frankly as you did. It's always beneficial to get some feedback. This is not New York [he was writing from Cambridge] and relevant intellectual opinions are hard to come by . . . . Hope to see you soon here or in New York."

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write an interesting book about Trilling in which he recants the article I so much disliked.[3] The real story of my break with Rahv, for anyone who is interested, was recounted in these pages three years ago, but it obviously escaped Professor Bloom's attention.[4] Alas, so much has.

My only reason for mentioning this minor episode is to indicate the extent to which, in small matters as well as large ones, Professor Bloom simply does not have much of a grip on the material he is writing about. Instead he has something else—an "idea," as I guess it must be called, and it is this: That just about everything about the history of the New York intellectuals—and most especially about their early radicalism and their subsequent anti-Communism—can be explained by the fact that many of them were not only Jews but the sons of impoverished Jewish immigrants. If at some point of their history, therefore, they rejected Marxism—even temporarily, as in some cases it turned out to be—and entered the social mainstream as journalists and academics, it was because of overreaching ambitions fostered by their disadvantaged social status. In other words, they sold out to Mammon.

This is not the first time the charge has been made, of course. The last time, as I recall, the indictment came from Lillian Hellman, who, in a famous passage in *Scoundrel Time,* explained the anti-Communism of the New York intellectuals in the following terms:

> Perhaps that, in part, was the penalty of nineteenth-century immigration. The children of timid immigrants are often remarkable people: energetic, intelligent, hardworking; and often they make it so good that they are determined to keep it at any cost.

Unlike Lillian Hellman, Professor Bloom is no Stalinist. He is just a little dense about what he is doing. He seems not to be the tiniest bit aware of the fact that his entire book is based on the old Stalinist charge of a sellout. No doubt he picked up this unlovely idea in the aftermath of the Sixties—a period when the whole notion of a "sellout" was elevated to the status of an *idée fixe.* For Professor Bloom, it isn't even an evil idea. He just accepts it as a plausible explanation—as *the* plausible explanation—for what happened, and without examining the matter very closely, builds his entire history on this flimsy foundation.

It is interesting, in this respect, to compare *Prodigal Sons* to what was, I believe, the earliest book to be written about the New York intellectuals—James Burkhart Gilbert's *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America.* Published in 1968, it too was written from the perspective of the Left—the old Left—and is likewise a product of the academy. But what a difference! For one thing, it sets its subject in the context of a history of American literary bohemia going back to the turn of the century, and is far more knowledgeable about the place occupied by literature in the development of the New York intellectual movement. For another, it is interested in ideas and in the impact that historical experience—especially, in this case, the experience of the radical movement in the heyday of the Communist Party—had on the ideas of the intellectuals and on their lives. Terminating with an account of the immediate post-World War II period, it too closes on a note of regret—its final chapter is called "The Failure of Nerve"—and what is regretted, of course, is the anti-Communism of the New York intellectuals and their support of the United States in the Cold War. Yet the book struggles valiantly, if mistakenly, to claim *Partisan Review* and its contributors for the radical movement despite their anti-Communism. Professor Gilbert was clearly uneasy about all this, but he nonetheless closed his book on a note of guarded praise. The word "Jews"—except for a reference to Mike Gold's novel, *Jews Without Money*—doesn't

3 *Lionel Trilling and the Fate of Cultural Criticism* (Northwestern University Press, 1986).

4 See "*Partisan Review*: Down the Memory Hole," in *The New Criterion,* September 1983.

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even appear in the index, and only two figures—Philip Rahv and Clement Greenberg—are identified as having come from Jewish immigrant families. The entire matter simply never comes up for discussion in *Writers and Partisans.*

In the index to *Prodigal Sons,* however, some twenty lines are devoted to "Jews," and the book itself is so obsessed with the subject that it reads at times like an academic parody of an old Clifford Odets play about growing up in the Bronx. The reason for this shift is perfectly obvious, I think. As long as the New York intellectuals could be claimed for the radical movement, there was no need to identify them as Jews. They were still to be counted among the good guys—though not *quite* as good, perhaps, as they once had been. But now that they must be identified as defectors from the radical movement and counted among the bad guys—well, what better reason can be found for their delinquency (even at times by writers who are themselves Jews) than their Jewishness?

So persuasive has this view now become, in some circles at least, that even Professor Gilbert has lately been converted to it. Reviewing *Prodigal Sons* in *The Nation*[5]—a journal that nowadays seems to specialize in accusing the Jews of everything—Professor Gilbert writes that "Bloom has certainly got part of the story right. The Jewishness . . . of this group of immigrant and second-generation intellectuals is a *key* to understanding their alienation and radicalism in the 1930s and 1940s." And again: "As Bloom argues, their immigrant origins are *crucial* to understanding them, as are their ambitions." (Emphases added.) Odd, isn't it, that this "key" is nowhere to be found in Professor Gilbert's own book? *Writers and Partisans* was far from flawless, to say the least, but when we compare its content to that of Professor Gilbert's review in *The Nation,* we are given a very vivid glimpse of the changes that have overtaken the academic perception of this subject since the Sixties. We are reminded, too, that it wasn't only on the young that the Sixties had a devastating impact.

What must finally be said about *Prodigal Sons,* however—and what has no doubt tempted Professor Bloom to look for what can only be called a scapegoat theory as a way of explaining his subject—is that it is very poor history. Indeed, for Professor Bloom the entire history of the period he is obliged to deal with in this book seems hardly to exist. About the history of Communism since the Russian Revolution, about Stalin and the Comintern and its activities in the United States, he appears to know nothing. Nor does he even appear to be interested in such matters. About the history of modern literature and the schools of criticism it spawned, he also knows nothing. The same is true of modern art and its criticism. Yet, taken together these are the historical developments that did more to shape the outlook and the achievements of the New York intellectuals than anything else, and Professor Bloom is utterly oblivious to their importance. They hardly exist as anything but bits of intellectual scenery for him. What he really writes about are "positions" and the career choices that are alleged to have determined them or resulted from them, which makes *Prodigal Sons* almost more of a vocational than an intellectual history. One can learn more about the real history of the period he is ostensibly writing about from a single essay by any one of the New York intellectuals in the Fifties than one can learn from this book. Take, for example, the piece that Leslie A. Fiedler wrote for *Commentary* in 1950 called "Hiss, Chambers, and the Age of Innocence." In the distinctions that Fiedler drew between Whittaker Chambers as a "Third Period" Communist and Alger Hiss as a Popular Front Communist, we are given the essence of an entire political epoch—precisely the epoch that did so much to determine the outlook of the New York intellectuals. Never mind that Fiedler subsequently made an intellectual ass of himself—that, too, is a part of the history of

5 *The Nation* for April 26, 1986.

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the New York intellectuals (and a part of the history of the Sixties) that Professor Bloom will never understand. Rereading Fiedler's essay and many others like it, one is also reminded of how markedly the level of writing about such subjects has declined since the Fifties. But to write well—on this, as on other matters—one has to know something. In fact, one has to know a great deal, and Professor Bloom knows very little.

Editor's note: Readers are reminded that no regular issues of *The New Criterion* are published during July or August. This year, a special summer supplement will be mailed to subscribers on July 15 and will be available at newsstands. (For information, see page eight in this issue.) The next regular issue of *The New Criterion* will appear in September.

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Putting the Sixties to bed

by Jed Perl

"Definitive Statements" is a show about American art between 1964 and 1966 that Kermit Champa, who teaches at Brown University, organized in collaboration with a group of graduate students there. The exhibition and the accompanying catalogue set out to demonstrate how postwar American art reached a high tide of achievement in the Minimalism, Color-field, and Pop Art of the mid-1960s. Paintings and sculptures by LeWitt, Marisol, Oldenburg, Olitski, Stella, Warhol, and twenty-six others are presented as works of established, unquestioned value. Both the show, which was elegantly installed at the List Art Center at Brown in March, and the catalogue, with its scholarly apparatus all in place, bespeak a serene confidence in the significance of everything that's under consideration.[1]

In a preface to the catalogue, Champa explains that "The challenge in *Definitive Statements* was to attempt an essay—both in the exhibition itself and in the accompanying catalogue—in art history of the most recent sort." Champa thinks that "American art of the 1964-1966 period has become, in spite of its recentness, historical rather than any longer contemporary." He sees the period as "a kind of sealed aesthetic unit containing both major work and major criticism" that is "positively ripe for scholarly review." There's a touch of glee in Champa's preface: the professor here finds himself sending his students off to study not Paris in 1860 or 1910, but a past he actually lived through and in which, as he tells us, he "played a 'bit' part." It must be fun to have your students write about the period you yourself participated in as a critic. In the bibliography we find Champa on Bannard (in 1968), on Frankenthaler (in 1972), on Olitski (in 1967), and on Poons (in 1968). Now, fifteen years later, Champa is looking at it all again from the perspective of the academy, with his students struggling through the bound volumes of the art magazines in the stacks. Champa found the work interesting when it was produced and he still likes it today: this continuity of taste is normal and altogether to be applauded. What's peculiar is Champa's willingness to let something he found urgent and vital twenty years ago slide—or even be pushed—into a closed past.

Why is there this haste to transform the contemporary into the historical? Champa insisted that his students, whenever possible, "avoid increasingly unreliable verbal

1 "Definitive Statements" was on view at Brown University's List Art Center, in Providence, Rhode Island, from March 1 to March 30. It will be on view at the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton, Long Island, from May 3 to June 21. The catalogue of the exhibition, published by Brown University ($10, 181 pages), includes a preface by Kermit Champa and essays by Michael Plante, Christopher Campbell, Megan Fox, Mitchell F. Merling, Jennifer Wells, and Ima Ebong, the graduate students who organized the show.

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history." He told them not to consult "the artistic and critical 'characters' of the period"—himself included—because these could be "unreliable." (Curiously, two dealers—André Emmerich and Leo Castelli—were interviewed by one of the graduate students: are dealers less biased than artists or critics?) It's as if the chief actors—most of whom are still alive and active—are being wished dead, so the messy weight of experience can be reduced to whatever record remains and the sorting and categorizing can begin. Champa believes that by relying on "the considerable written record" (Champa's articles included) "something like 'real' history has been served." Those quotation marks around real are really something. "Real" history is, apparently, history in a book, where everything has been neatly processed to fit into a single perspective—the perspective of the historian. The confidence of "Definitive Statements"—reflected in that very final-sounding title—is a bit unbelievable. Perhaps the self-assurance masks some sort of anxiety: a feeling that the art one believed in when one was young no longer looks the same. This urgency about getting the preserving fluid into the body of Sixties art and the body comfortably ensconced in the mausoleum—could it be based on a fear that the whole mix of elements in the work of some twenty years ago remains all too alive, and subject to drastic alterations by experience, changes of perspective, the ravages of time?

When the art of the 1960s is shown in New York it never feels merely "historical." Pop, Minimalism, and Color-field are living issues—alive in the art of those who continue to work out of these ideas, and alive in the enormous impact they've had on everything that's come after. Warhol can't be separated from Salle; Judd can't be separated from Serra. Today's art world, with its trend setters and fashion forecasters, has its origins in the consensus-thinking that Pop, Minimalism, and Color-field laid on top of the old-fashioned heterogeneity of the art world of the 1940s and 1950s. (Back then they didn't even call it an "art world"—it was too small.)

"Definitive Statements" makes the Sixties look squeaky-clean; it's the mid-Sixties as a Yuppie success story. Clement Greenberg is Chief Executive Officer, Minimalism represents Heavy Industry, and Pop takes care of the mass-market end of things. Nowhere in the catalogue is it even suggested that anyone ever questioned—either during the 1960s or later—the whole gestalt of mainstream Sixties aesthetics. In the amazingly homogeneous installation at the List Art Center at Brown, one got the feeling the mid-Sixties were a kind of Parnassus of High Art, with poets and a few muses living in perfect harmony. No one else need apply.

The work gathered here is characterized pretty much without exception by its imperturbable, seamless surfaces. Aside from the poured forms of Frankenthaler (which really belong to an earlier moment), there's a near total absence of the autographic touch, and this makes a connection between the Color-field paintings of Olitski and Poons, the Pop of Warhol and Wesselmann, and the Minimalism of Judd and Andre. For the organizers of the show the up-frontness of the work—its rejection of literal depth or the sensation of depth—is the culmination of painting's long march, since the mid-nineteenth century, toward the surface. We can all probably agree that in modern art pictorial space is less and less a matter of fictive depth; with Cubism pictorial space does in fact move forward from the picture plane—into the viewer's space. But at "Definitive Statements" it's as if the space has closed up completely, and what drama remains isn't a drama within the painting so much as a drama that takes place around the work. The defenders of Color-field will probably say this is the case with Minimalism but not with Color-field—Greenberg has said something along these lines. But all this work puts the viewer in the position of looking *at* something rather than looking *into* it. And this is a distinction that seems to me fatal to the health of painting and sculpture.

John McCracken's luridly colored *Violet Block in Two Parts*—it's made of plywood sprayed with some thirty coats of paint to

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look as shiny as enameled metal—might be a kind of emblem for the entire show. Though the McCracken—which was made in Los Angeles—has a particularly Southern Californian ethos, the lion's share of the works in "Definitive Statements" reflect a related fondness for technological perfection as a utopian ideal. At "Definitive Statements" one is carried back to the New Age Sixties sensibility. It was a time when computers were just beginning to be talked about, and a lot of people believed technology was going to create a Global Village—a high-tech Family of Man. "Definitive Statements" also includes—in Marisol's oversized doll and in Bontecou's multi-layered iron construction—a bit of the artsy-craftsy underside of the Sixties sensibility. But most of the art in the show has the gleaming colors and easy-clean surfaces of suburban America in the penultimate days of its postwar dream. The materials—formica, neon, plexiglass, sprayed paint—are the stuff of shopping centers and fast-food chains. The unnaturalness of the colors—the brilliant reds and greens, violets and magentas—suggest a conquest of messy nature.

The homogeneity of this mid-Sixties art made it possible for the organizers of "Definitive Statements" to put together one of the niftiest pieces of installation I've ever seen. So perfect was the juxtaposition of colors and forms that it was easy to believe the various loans had been engineered with a precise installation plan in mind. This was exhibition installation as interior decor. There was a black, white, and gray corner, where a LeWitt, a Morris, a Martin, an Oldenburg, and a Bontecou resided in happy harmony. An Olitski with circles of deep red and blue was set next to an Andy Warhol *Brillo* box, decorated in almost exactly the same colors. Artschwager's *Telephone Directory,* in greenish-gray formica, was next to Stella's greenish-gray *Abajo.* Caro's *Kasser,* with two flat purple "arms" angling into the air, was next to Noland's *Off,* in which the stripes, though of different colors, were exactly the same width as the elements in the Caro. Poons's colored ovals (in *Sagre de Christo*) made a neat decorative backdrop for Marisol's *Baby Boy* (you could also see Poons's spots nicely reflected in Larry Bell's untitled glass box). And in perhaps the cleverest juxtaposition in the whole show, di Suvero's wood and iron *Departure 2001* was set next to a Wesselmann still life, so that the rough hunk of wood projecting off of a tilted piece of steel in the di Suvero looked amazingly like the big piece of crumpled aluminum foil held in the hand of a woman in the Wesselmann. Despite the cramped quarters in which "Definitive Statements" was mounted, the show flowed beautifully.

It was fun to get in tune with this curatorial matching game. Once you realized every single juxtaposition was carefully thought through, you could begin to play along, figuring out why a piece was in a particular place, as if you were doing a visual crossword puzzle. What made it all work was the odd, silent complicity of the art, which rarely asserted anything beyond the prettiness of its colors or the handsomeness of its forms. The most interesting pictorial effects one encountered in "Definitive Statements" were a certain shimmering of the surface (Olitski) or a flexing of the plane, which gave a sense of space as made up of several hinged units (Noland, Stella, Caro). Otherwise, the images were somnolent, items in a decor. The whole ensemble sat together so neatly, so pertly, you had to smile.

"Definitive Statements" looked like a high-art version of the 1960-1975 section of the "High Styles" design show which was at the Whitney Museum this past winter. One had at "Definitive Statements" all the essential elements of Sixties taste: the sleek surfaces, the high-tech materials (some of which by now look rather low tech), the romance of misty colors, and the elevation of pop images to icon status. "Definitive Statements" should have included a little decorative-arts coda, like the one at the Boucher show at the Metropolitan: all you needed was an inflatable vinyl couch, a Fillmore poster with art nouveau lettering, and a big violet plastic coffee cup.

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At the deepest level, what joins all the art in "Definitive Statements" is a spirit of grasping, voracious ambition. In these works one feels an eagerness to be done with the messy nonsense of producing works of art—a desire to get on with what the artists obviously believe is the real business of art, the business of taking one's place in history. The Minimalists, the Pop Artists, and the Color-field painters have different views of the history of modern art; but they have all defined themselves, almost from the beginnings of their careers, through their desire to enter the history books. They're not interested in the Romantic idea of the artist as an individual creator; they want to be validated in the cavalcade of current events, which they believe leads straight to immortality. This is probably why their art fits so neatly into the scheme of an art-historical show like Kermit Champa's at Brown: the art lies down and plays dead for the historians because that's what it's always really wanted to do. The various disagreements between the Color-field people, the Minimal people, and the Pop people make the would-be historian's job all the easier, because the history is self-dramatizing in a clear, unequivocal way. Since one isn't ever pulled very far into the paintings or sculptures as distinct, irreducible experiences, it's easy to categorize them. They were made to be placed; one might almost say they were placed before they were made.

Everything in this show feeds off a jingoistic, provincial insistence on the myth of the great moment of American art—which is Abstract Expressionism. This confidence is evoked in the very first line of Michael Plante's catalogue essay on "The Fifties Legacy: Toward a New Aesthetic." "The period from 1964 to 1966 represented the culmination of a twenty-five year development in which Amerian art—particularly that produced in New York City—reached the zenith of avant-garde production in terms of originality and quality." Heady words: zenith, originality, quality. Art history is here a glorious, unimpeded climb from (to quote Christopher Campbell in "The Art of the Sixties: Soliloquies and Conversations") "formalist reductionism" to "profoundly new experiences." The whole period from the end of World War II to the middle of the 1960s is seen as instant history, with works of art taking their places in some definitive art-historical chronology practically while the paint is still wet on the canvases in the studio (and don't forget how fast acrylic dries). In writing about Olitski's paintings "from 1965 forward" Campbell says that "they continue the historical precedent of Pollock's gravitationally driven line, Louis' sluice of liquid paint, Stella's hand-painted imprecision, and Noland's spreading color stain." That expression "historical precedent" is extraordinary. Paintings created one, two, five, ten, at most fifteen years before are seen as "historical precedents"—as fixed points in a completed past. Some of us aren't as sure about Rembrandt and Raphael as Kermit Champa and company are about Stella and Noland: this assurance is a kind of oppression, a deadening of experience.

The yearning for conclusions that haunts "Definitive Statements" keeps bringing the authors of the catalogue essays back to Clement Greenberg. Though Greenberg doesn't like between half and two-thirds of the work in the show, his certainty, his assertion of the importance of the moment, is a benefit to everyone involved. He's quoted insistently, and the Sixties begin to look like a great Greenbergian pure water river out of which and toward which other smaller streams flow. Even when he's not quoted, his obsessions—with the collapse of color and line into a unified, all-over surface, with the end of chiaroscuro—are repeated like a cult follower's mantra. Here is Michael Plante on Louis: "Louis poured and flooded his canvas, negating drawing, working against shape, and avoiding light and dark contrasts." Ideas about postwar art which have an urgency when encountered in Greenberg's work are turned into conventional thoughts in the "Definitive Statements" catalogue. The picture of Greenberg presented here is a typical contemporary view.

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We get no sense of the grand, clear prose style of *Art and Culture,* of the critic who insists on the direct experience of the work of art, or of the few, trenchant insights he garnered from Hofmann and the other artists in the faraway days on Eighth Street. One has in "Definitive Statements" none of the sense of discovery that floods through Greenberg's beautiful essay on "The Late Thirties in New York." (There are, in that essay and elsewhere in Greenberg, insights about personalities and motivations which suggest the gifts of a great autobiographer.) No: at Brown we get the other side of Greenberg. Here Greenberg is the author of a science of art criticism; he lays waste to the entire history of postwar art in order to clear a highway for the fortunate few. Quality, that great Greenbergian word, becomes in "Definitive Statements" something fixed and dead. The benign prettiness of every single object in this show is dangerously close to—is, finally, indistinguishable from—quality in fashion. Taste is a reduction from some known standard of the past. To add anything fundamental to the brew would be to call first principles into question—and this must never be done.

The attraction of this art-critical position most likely rests in its immunity to doubt. This line of thought makes it possible to avoid those moments in front of works of art when we don't know exactly what we're looking for or if we've found it. The theory we encounter in "Definitive Statements" has such cachet because it explains the passage of time and gives ultimate value to the mad, chaotic headlong rush of events. Those of us who don't buy this partitioning of the 1960s into categories with titles which sound like name brands—Color-field, Pop, Minimal, Op (though Op isn't regarded by the Brown crowd as quite respectable)—have nothing so neat to offer in response. Other critics who have written about the period—Fairfield Porter, Hilton Kramer—look dishevelled in the variety of their interests, the variousness of their enthusiasms. The 1960s of a Porter or a Kramer would be too much for the grad students: too many movements, figures, no main line. Yet it must be said that Clement Greenberg is a critic who prompts something like rage in many painters and critics who were active during the 1950s and 1960s. Probably precisely because many of Greenberg's contemporaries feel somewhere deep in him the genuine love of art, Greenberg's denial of a variety of values—his rejection even in his beloved Abstract Expressionists of what he calls Whitmanesque longings—seems a terrible monopolizing and homogenizing of experience. But in mentioning what some of Greenberg's contemporaries say about him I've broken Kermit Champa's rule to "avoid . . . verbal history." Better to accept what's in the final chapters of Janson's and Gardner's histories of art. "Real" history.

So tight is the clutch of Greenbergian formalism around "Definitive Statements" that we hardly get any sense of the social history of the Sixties. Art has no obligation to respond to the times, but one imagines, when Pop is under discussion, that the social scene will loom larger than it does in Ima Ebong's gingerly essay on "The New Visual Culture." Ebong proposes to step into the heady delirium of the Sixties sensibility, but she takes with her only Greenberg (of course) and, as a kind of counterbalance, the biggest gun of Sixties mass-culture literature, Marshall McLuhan. In her Greenberg/McLuhan polarity (she also mentions Harold Rosenberg), Ebong achieves a nicely formalized, sanitized version of a decade that brought forth a great, rich outpouring of thought. The essay has no texture. Where is Dwight MacDonald, whose *Against the American Grain: Essays on the Effects of Mass Culture* was published in 1962? How about Pauline Kael, who brought out her first collection, *I Lost It at the Movies,* in 1965, and whose seminal essay, "Trash, Art and the Movies," appeared in *Harper's* in 1969. And where is the Susan Sontag of "Notes on Camp" (1964) and "One Culture and the New Sensibility" (1965), both collected in 1965 in *Against Interpretation*? Perhaps all this might get us lost along too many diverse avenues.

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Only once at the exhibition do the 1960s as a time we all lived through seem to rear their head. This is on a little wall where a small version of Robert Indiana's *Love* is hung above one of Andy Warhol's *Race Riot* silkscreens. Seeing these legendary images at firsthand is an odd experience; they look pale and recessive, not a bit as zingy as when we first saw them in the color pages of *Time* and *Newsweek*. Looking at the "originals" makes one think of Lincoln's remark when he first met Harriet Beecher Stowe: "So this is the little woman who started this big war." There's still a little surprise in the phenomenon of something so diminutive and unimposing setting off the attack of Pop. At Brown, Pop turns academic and authoritative and grand. The show could have been called "Reductive Statements."

It was interesting to go through the paintings and sculptures in "Definitive Statements" with an eye for the little evidences of physical decay. One could note the peeling off of pieces of tape on Stella's *Sunapee IV*; the dirty surfaces of Olitski's *Half Chinese Patutsky* (has anyone ever written an essay on Sixties titles?); the doll's face cracking and peeling on Marisol's *Baby Boy*. The issues of Sixties art are still very much alive; but for these particular works the slow slide into oblivion has begun. This scholarly show was an Ivy League version of the pop music stations' walks down memory lane. The Sixties had been put to bed.

Displayed on a pedestal at "Definitive Statements"—a bit gray with the dust of twenty years—was Oldenburg's plaster wedge of wedding cake. This piece has to it a sweet story. In 1966, Oldenburg made a plaster cake for the wedding of two collectors, and slices were given out to the guests as party favors. This sculpture is a souvenir of the Sixties—of the noisy, electric Innocence and Experience of those Blakean years when it seemed one's personal growth (forgotten word) was part of a larger, oceanic growth —a surge in the cosmos. One can imagine that Sixties wedding—an event probably no more or less amusing than many in Surrealist Paris or 1920s New York. Apocalypse, of a pleasant, purplish variety, was in the air. The Oldenburg cake—this was a wonderful conceit. It gave a self-consciously artistic aura to the whole affair. What fun to take home a piece of Pop by a real Pop artist. The wedding became a send-up of weddings, and at least a few guests probably left with the knowledge that they had in hand "An Oldenburg." A work of *value*.

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Hare, tortoise, umpire

by Dan Hofstadter

And by the tree each put down their stake
What it was or who they agreed
To have as umpire isn't our affair.
—La Fontaine, "The Hare and the Tortoise"

Whether Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin and and François Boucher were ever in conscious competition with each other is a question that will probably have to remain unanswered. No documents have been found that support such a conjecture, which may seem, on the face of it, farfetched. For one thing, they did very different sorts of work. Boucher was a purveyor of sylphs and cherubs in the purest *style pâtisserie*; in their scrumptious birthday suits these creatures were destined to romp within the boiseries of the intimate suites that came into vogue during the reign of Louis XV. Chardin, by contrast, tackled mostly humble subjects, kitchen still lifes and bourgeois interiors. Boucher was elected professor of history painting at the Academy of Fine Arts, and later was appointed painter to the court; Chardin was barely able to get his foot in the Academy door, and then only as a modest "specialist in animals and fruit." Yet the social distance between the two was perhaps less great than it seems. Once within the Academy, Chardin became the official hanger of exhibitions, a position of some importance, and his art was more consistently admired by people of taste than was Boucher's. In the late 1730s, Chardin threw himself into a series of genre pictures which turned out superbly, and, interestingly enough, Boucher soon began painting genre pictures, too. Boucher's also turned out well, though perhaps not as well as Chardin's, and in one of them, *The Breakfast,* was a figure of a little girl (she holds a wooden donkey with a pannier of flowers) that for its tender solidity of modeling looks almost like the work of Chardin.

When Boucher gave up genre painting a few years later, folk wondered if he hadn't been discouraged by Chardin's superiority in this line. In fact, the more closely one looks into the two men's lives, the harder it becomes to conceive that they didn't feel a certain rivalry. Chardin was born in 1699, Boucher in 1703; both were the sons of artisans, *petits Parisiens*; both excelled at rendering children and animals; both set great store by manual skill; and both were at times collected by the same people, especially the Swedish Crown Princess, Lovisa Ulrica. As far as professional pride went, both had, in La Fontaine's expression, much the same, if not exactly a common, "stake."

La Fontaine tells us that it is not "our affair" to know who was the umpire when the hare raced the tortoise. Shrewd: for in most such moral contests, the umpire's identity, if indeed he exists at all, is a matter of the murkiest speculation. In this particular case, though, it is capitally our "affair" to know just who he was. Fortunately, we can even see him, in Fragonard's famous, if rather disjointed, portrait: the balding skull,

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the darting, inquisitive glance, the mind—as we guess—provocative, and easily provoked. His name was Denis Diderot; in 1767 the combative *philosophe* had accepted the job of art critic for Friedrich-Melchior Grimm's magazine *Correspondance littéraire*. For whatever Chardin and Boucher may have thought of each other in secret, it was Diderot who in fact came along and implicitly invited the world to compare them. By decrying Boucher's work in much the same terms as those in which he championed Chardin's, he invented—not materially, but as an intellectual construct—the great derby between the prototypical hare and the prototypical tortoise of art.

The *Correspondance littéraire* was published abroad irregularly and probably never had more than fifteen subscribers. Diderot agreed to provide the magazine with reviews of the French Academy exhibitions, which were held every other August in odd-numbered years. Because these shows were mounted in the "square salon" of the Louvre, which was still a royal place, they were referred to as "salons"; and so too were Diderot's reviews. Ranging from mere notices to long essays, these "salons"—together with other sundry writings on art—fill two fairly dense volumes in the new Hermann edition.[1] Spanning the period from 1759 to 1771, with two additional accounts of the salons of 1775 and 1781, they afford the most comprehensive critical view we possess of mid-eighteenth-century French art. A minor product of Diderot's genius, they nonetheless suffice to make him one of the three or four French art critics of decisive historical and literary interest.

Diderot's art criticism was first and foremost a course of self-education. In 1759, he knew little about art; by 1781 he was an authority on the subject. Naturally his views changed somewhat during this period, and his language often seems molded by the expectation that only three people, none of them representative of any segment of the public, would actually read what he wrote: his editor Grimm (later J. H. Meister), his friend Sophie Volland, and Catherine of Russia.[2] Hence, one supposes, a certain rhetorical freedom, a bold balancing of antitheses. Diderot's judgments on current art were not novel in his time and would fit in snugly with those of most art-lovers today, but his manner of discourse was, and remains, disconcerting. He projected an image of himself as ruthlessly penetrating and blunt even to cruelty; one could perhaps say that he was the first of the "moody, irascible" critics. Above all, he wanted to seem—and to *be*—sincere. By turning his art-critical persona into something like a literary character he was wagering that he could annex art criticism to literature, almost to drama. Indeed his voice grew remarkably dramatic, now damning to hell, now praising to the skies, now expressing the deepest regret for earlier ill-considered judgments. This must have been as theatrical as a critic's voice could get; on occasion Diderot even borrowed a trick from the stage melodrama by proposing to pry into hidden vices of style or kinks of personal behavior.

On the whole Diderot wanted French art to return to the obliquely moralizing history

1 *Les Salons* by Diderot was published in two volumes by Hermann, in Paris, in 1984. For the present article, I have made use of the essays in *Diderot & l'Art, de Boucher à David: Les Salons: 1759-1781* (Éditions de la Réunion de Musées nationaux), which was published in connection with an exhibition at the Hôtel de la Monnaie in 1984. The contributors include Jean Starobinski, Jacques Chouillet, Pierre Rosenberg, Georges Brunel, Régis Michel, Jean-René Gaborit, Christian Michel, Udo van de Sandt. The volume was edited by Marie-Catherine Sahut and Nathalie Volle. Georges Brunel's provocative piece, "Boucher, Neveu de Rameau," makes, despite its title, only slight mention of *Rameau's Nephew*, toward its end. I have, in a sense, continued the discussion. The translation of La Fontaine at the outset is by James Michie.

2 It should be noted that Diderot had some of his "salons" copied by hand; these were presumably passed about inside France, allowing him to reach a greater audience.

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painting of *le grand siècle*; he couldn't quite accept that virtues like courage and self-sacrifice were for the new middle classes merely literary conceits, with little application to everyday life. Where his art criticism seems proto-Romantic and proto-modern is in its demand that painting address the spectator's sensibility, that it touch some chord in his heart. Never diverging from the orthodox view that certain subjects were nobler than others, he nonetheless insisted that the important thing, whatever the subject, was the artist's mimetic empathy with his chosen motif. "The object is disgusting," he wrote with queasy admiration of a dead skate-fish painted by Chardin, "but it is the very flesh of the creature." Diderot had a word for Chardin's reverence for the world of appearances; he called it his "hush." And to represent the "rowdy" school of painting, no one fell more easily to hand of course than that harlequin of the palette, François Boucher.

As an exemplar of artistic authenticity Chardin was made to order. He painted only what he knew, and his execution was mercifully free of both Italianate and Netherlandish mannerisms. His slowness, too, was legendary: he painstakingly "dragged" his broken colors over and through each other till his surfaces looked knitted or woven. As early as 1759 the Abbé Raynal observed to a correspondent that Chardin "applies his colors one after the other, so that his pictures resemble a . . . tapestry made with the *point carré* stitch." Within a few decades the parallel between Chardin's patient diligence and that of the Revolutionary knitting ladies —the infamous *tricoteuses*—became plain enough to be seriously misleading; and though Chardin was no more a social critic than the dead hares and partridges he painted, the *mise en évidence* of his industry did herald a major shift in taste. No longer would the effect of laboriousness be considered a sign of ineptitude. His friend Cochin's description of his approach to his work suggests a strikingly modern sensibility: "'Here is an object to be painted,' [Chardin] would say to himself. 'To achieve a truthful rendering of it, I must forget everything I have seen and even the way in which such subjects have been treated by others. I must place it sufficiently far away not to be able to see the details. I must apply myself to copying, with the greatest verisimilitude, the general masses, the shades of color-tones, the curves, the effect of light and shadow.'" So might any number of today's representational painters also describe their practice.

Initially cool to Chardin, Diderot soon comes around to feeling something like pure trust in the painter's eye: he even enlists him as his cicerone through the biennial salons. "If Chardin tells me that blue and red clash," he writes early on, "I'll believe him." In 1769 he records with delight Chardin's remark that one paints not with colors but "with emotions [*le sentiment*]," and notes his conviction that Chardin, though unfortunately not a history painter, "is still a great man." By degrees the critic comes to recognize that only a twofold standard, calibrated for executive truth as well as invention and grandezza, can take the measure of an artist's work. He is dazzled by the breadth of Chardin's handling and by the "magical" sensation that he has dipped his brush not into paint but into the very essence of stone, earthenware, copper, flesh. A contemplative soul, Diderot is flattered that Chardin appeals so strictly to the contemplative sense. This painter, he writes, has philosophical "sang-froid"; his broken-color technique candidly invites the viewer to an act of co-creation wherein he may mentally gather a jumble of color tones into a final image of nature; it is like the triumphant last step in the reassemblage of a shattered vase. Chardin's painting is that extraordinary thing, a try for the truth: both his subjects and his method metaphorically propose a conception of what is to be considered natural.

Chardin liked to insist on the difficulties of painting; "De la douceur!" he would say to the critics when their hectoring got out of hand. This was one counsel that Diderot never heeded, though, especially when he

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turned his attention to Boucher. From 1765 on his harangues against the already aged master acquired an almost guignol-like vehemence. Born in 1713, Diderot had arrived too late upon the scene to appreciate the "petit goût" of the unheroic, relatively small paintings of Watteau and his epigones Pater and Lancret. Made to be installed in the delicate private chambers and *cabinets* of early eighteenth-century townhouses, these pictures smacked to him of cultural putrescence. Their status as luxury objects offended his social sensibilities, while their function as the pictorial equivalent of "blue" jokes ruffled his respect for the seriousnes of art. Oddly enough, despite his antagonism toward the Bourbon regime, Diderot was in substantial agreement with Louis XV's arts administration, which was then trying rather futilely to encourage painting in the grand manner; this was a policy which Boucher, whose art (along with his pupil Fragonard's) was the last lovely flaring-up of the "petit goût," for the most part disdainfully ignored. Diderot admired Boucher's talent, but he also despised his taste; casting about for a label for this irritating virtuoso, he came up with one that was truly inspired: Boucher was a *faux bon peintre*. Like Chardin, then, Boucher was to be acknowledged as a "good" painter, but with this crucial difference: whereas Chardin was good at achieving veracity, Boucher was good at achieving falsity. Chardin's was an art of "fascination," Boucher's one of "seduction."

In all fairness it must be said that Boucher seldom attempted to convey the effect of truth. His painting was not, by and large, a vision of what was to be considered natural but rather a translation of stage conventions into painting mannerisms. He had grown up in the neighborhood of Saint-Germain-des-Près, which was then the center of fairground mummery: the vast common between the medieval abbey of St. Germain and the perpetually unfinished church of St. Sulpice was crammed with little "panto" theaters whose troupes had only recently received the royal permission to speak upon the boards (the right of utterance having previously belonged only to companies chartered by the Crown). Like his rococo predecessors, Boucher adored these popular theaters; one of his closest friends was the writer-director-actor Charles-Simon Favart, for whose Théâtre de la Foire he designed stage sets. None of these survive, but the sort of rendering that one may observe in presumably comparable scenery—for instance, in the eighteenth-century wings for the theater at Drottningholm, the summer residence of the Swedish monarchs—is analogous to Boucher's way of concocting scenic surroundings for his figures. Favart was one of the reigning masters of pastoral comedy, a form characteristic of the period, and Boucher's "painted pastorals" were directly derived from this theatrical genre. "Especially in the accessories of his pastorals, his virtuosity is incredible," wrote Diderot of these pictures. "[But] the grace of his shepherdesses is merely the grace of Mme Favart [Favart's pretty actress-wife] in *Rose et Colas*." It is not that Diderot objected to theatricality as such, for he greatly admired Greuze's feeling for melodramatic choreography, and his own reviews were passably histrionic. It is rather that Boucher was creating simulacra of a particularly base variety of pastoral skit, one that is sometimes called "false pastorale" because it carefully avoided treating of the harsh life of real herding communities, featuring off-color jokes and sexual horseplay instead. Seen from a certain angle, Boucher's failure of verisimilitude was really a stunning success at capturing the cheap world of the "panto" theater, but that was cold comfort to Diderot. For him Boucher had preferred a false footlight glow to the simple light of day.

In effect, Diderot's chief contribution to our understanding of the visual arts lies in his introduction of the idea of sincerity into painting criticism. This idea is more important in French literature than it is in our own. From Montaigne to Mme de la Fayette, from Laclos to Rousseau, the major prose writers revolved it in their minds; within a few years of Diderot's death Benjamin Constant would make it the focus of

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an obsession unparalleled in Anglo-American letters. Diderot's main contribution to this stream of thought was of course the dialogue *Rameau's Nephew,* and it is in the light of this dialogue (composed between 1769 and 1773) that it is most fruitful to consider Diderot's verdict on Boucher. For if by the mid-1760s Boucher's hare starts decisively to fall behind Chardin's tortoise, that is largely because Diderot's umpire finds Boucher so utterly and obnoxiously insincere. And thereby hangs a paradox, for if we learn anything at all about the human heart from reading *Rameau's Nephew,* it is that sincerity is so volatile a state of mind as to be practically nonexistent.

Rameau's Nephew is a dialogue between a parasitical flatterer of the rich and famous—the eponymous nephew of Rameau the composer—and Diderot himself. It purports to record a conversation, in the Café de la Régence, which touches at once on the corruption of French society, the right way to compose for the musical theater, the whys and wherefores of creativity, and the nature of the good life. At the same time it serves Diderot as a platform for discreet self-criticism and for the lampooning of various enemies.

The man with the monicker "Rameau's nephew" is what the eighteenth century called a "scapegrace" (*un gueux*), but he is a peculiarly self-conscious scapegrace in that he offers a spirited attack on the whole idea of personal and artistic integrity; in a way he is the literary embodiment of Hume's denial that personal identity is empirically demonstrable. In opposing Rameau's nephew, Diderot (or the character who represents him in the dialogue) defends the conventional view that every adult must arrive at a responsible conception of his role in society. Diderot appears to win the debate, for at the end Rameau's nephew dissolves in tears at the thought of the misery he has caused himself. Yet close scrutiny of the dialogue reveals that there is a moment at which Diderot absorbs his opponent's point of view. "The real distinction between [Rameau's nephew] and most of those about us," he says in an aside to the reader, "is that he acknowledges, without hypocrisy, his and others' vices. He is no more and no less abominable than they, but he is franker and more consequent in his reasoning, and sometimes genuinely profound in his depravation."

It is here that Diderot strikes upon the inherent paradox in the idea of sincerity, namely that one cannot test one's sincerity without consulting one's heart, yet just this act of self-consciousness banishes any possibility of true candor. By the same token, Diderot is obliged to acknowledge that the plainest form of insincerity, which is flattery, actually represents a form of candor so long as it is sufficiently "shameless," that is, avowed or self-conscious. Sincerity and flattery may even be seen as "dialectically" complementary, as they are in Hegel's chapter in the *Phenomenology* on the cloven consciousness of modern culture. Hegel speaks of the "heroism of flattery," of frankly avowing that one never really means what one says. With this notion, one enters the pantomime version of eighteenth-century culture, in which flattery, envy, buffoonery, revolt—all the options available to men rich in ideas but poor in revenues—are played out upon the stage of life by the Pantalones and Scaramouches of café society.

That is not quite the world that one entered on walking into the superb Boucher exhibition recently mounted at the Metropolitan Museum, but very nearly so. One felt bathed—so much is certain—in the queer footlight glow of the pictures. The show had most of the best Bouchers; notably absent were only the Victoria and Albert's portrait of Mme de Pompadour, the excellent works in the Wallace and Frick collections (neither of which lends), and the Alte Pinakothek's *Blonde Odalisque* of 1752, perhaps the artist's greatest work. With its eighty-odd paintings and smattering of tapestries and porcelains, this was a beguiling middle-sized exhibition rather than a huge and tedious one—a huge one *would* have been tedious—and the layman may perhaps be given leave to predict that the rich catalogue, written chiefly by

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Alastair Laing (who also organized the show), will remain a monument in its field for as long as we live.[3]

Right from the start one sees that Boucher is fascinated by textiles and patterns; he is one of those painters whom the great French art historian Henri Focillon called "volontiers costumiers"—eager to invent and to arrange draperies. This interest in *la mode* already suggests an inclination toward impertinence of form and gesture, for fashion tends always to flirt with the boundaries of respectability: the earliest painting in the exhibition shows a mincing, richly swathed St. Bartholomew with upturned eyes fixed firmly on the third loges. As Boucher gradually discovers the sorts of subjects that will suit his temperament—religion wasn't among them—he fills his pictures with rococo accessories; yet in a way (as Mr. Laing suggests) he was not (except in his landscape *capricci* and his *chinoiseries*) a fully rococo painter: he is better described as "attenuated Baroque." While in Paris some months ago, I noticed some grisaille sketches of Boucher's hanging amid the displays of rococo boiseries in the newly renovated Musée des Arts Décoratifs, and the stylistic disjunction was striking. Rocaille ornamentation features reverse and broken curves; it is not, as it is supposed to be, very sensuous, but rather spinous, boney, shell-like, writhing. Boucher does now and again feature some "vegetation of almost demented vitality"—Mr. Laing's phrase—but on the whole his vision is of a world of almost unrelievedly *bombé* or convex forms. Another thing one observes, as Boucher begins to conjugate his figures in groups, is his relative lack of interest in the story or myth he is relating. Some of these themes are stale chestnuts (*Leda and the Swan, The Rape of Europa*), others too obscure to resonate (*Venus Requesting Vulcan for Arms for Aeneas, Vertumnus and Pomona*), but whatever they may be, Boucher rarely invests them with any metaphorical passion or vigor. It is most curious that this painter who was by temperament so much of an illustrator should have cared so little to work up a ripping illustration for a story. In fact, one discovers—if one looks up the relevant texts in Ovid or Tasso or the master's other sources—that with Boucher it is really the stories which illustrate the paintings: they illustrate the sly mythological uses to which so many square inches of rosy lady, muscular gent, or jowly bambino may be put. Boucher's coolness to metaphor—to the whole Baroque tradition of metaphor—reminds me in a backward sort of way of Valéry's famous definition of *la politesse* as "organized indifference," by which the poet meant a social attitude unadulterated with intrusive familiarity. Boucher's figure paintings seem a parallel form of organized indifference: far be it from me, he seems to be saying, to actually get *interested* in these people. This, of course, is precisely the attitude that one would want pictorialized upon one's walls if one were the sort of hostess who prided herself on giving perfectly charming receptions without, however, conveying to her guests the perhaps uncomfortable suspicion that she was the least bit curious about their doings, ideas, or feelings. In a sense, then, there *is* some metaphorical substance to Boucher, but it has chiefly to do with manners and self-mastery—*le savoir-vivre*. One of the accomplishments of the well-bred French hostess is that she can drop a topic quicker than you can say *"Un ange passe."* The angel in this formula (which signifies that no one in present company can for the moment find anything proper to say) might well have been designed by Boucher.

Unlike both Boucher and Chardin, Diderot was of provincial origin; having grown

3 *François Boucher, 1703-1770* was published by the Metropolitan Museum of Art (384 pages, $35 hardcover, $25 paper). It includes essays by Pierre Rosenberg, Alastair Laing, J. Patrice Marandel, Edith A. Standen, and Antoinette Faÿ-Hallé, and catalogue notes by Alastair Laing. The Boucher exhibition was on view at the Metropolitan from February 17 through May 4. It travels to the Detroit Institute of Arts (May 27-August 17) and the Grand Palais in Paris (September 1986-January 5, 1987).

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up in the then small town of Langres, he knew what trees and meadows looked like. It was consequently sensible for him, in testing the naturalness of a painter's rhetoric, to ask how well his pictorial syntax could entertain or encompass the characteristic shapes of nature herself. Boucher's landscape work failed this test miserably ("not a tuft like anything in all our hills and dales"), and as one advances through the show at the Met one can easily see why. If the twentieth-century American conception of the perfect landscape may be described as a slice of Devon or Dorset with little holes in it (i.e., the typical country club golf course), Boucher's notion of an Arcadian France might be characterized as broccoli covered with hoarfrost. The great exception to this rule is the wonderful *Forest Scene with Two Roman Soldiers* of 1740, which, though presumably painted in the studio, suggests with its accurate tonality and sheer wealth of sylvan incident that Boucher must have sketched a good deal from nature (as, in fact, he did, in the Prince de Guise's untended grounds at Arcueil). The viewer's astonishment before this painting—his intimate recognition of that rarity in Boucher's work, an authentic pictorial experience—suggests why Diderot never applied the paradox of sincerity to Boucher's enterprise, or, in fact, to painting in general. It was simply that he experienced, from time to time, a certain strange feeling—gooseflesh if you will—which told him that a painting was truthful; it was a deep transfixing *frisson* that struck through his exquisite self-awareness. If he could have visited the Met this year perhaps he would have stood thus transfixed not only before the *Forest Scene* but also before Boucher's almost preternaturally truthful *Woman Fastening Her Garter, The Dark-Haired Odalisque,* and many odd passages of flesh, drapery, and animal painting—for one loves Boucher for bits and pieces as one loves no other painter. I like to think he would have stood awhile before the handmaiden in the lower lefthand corner of *Europa* and the swain with the birdcage in *Le pasteur complaisant.*

That is, however, unlikely. Diderot's eye for art was not as great as his ear for dialogue. He does not seem to have been able to pick out the gems of observation in Boucher's work, nor, for that matter, to see where Chardin's sense of authenticity deserted him. There are certain aspects of Chardin's painting—his somewhat formulaic reliance on umbery browns, his use of a false-looking aerial perspective in those of his interiors which show two rooms—which are rather less compelling than the rest. Most off-putting of course is Chardin's habit of copying his paintings many times over, a practice that would seem wholly inauthentic in a contemporary painter. I have never seen a Chardin exhibition, but I've been told by a painter-friend of mine who has that the "prime" versions are almost always easily discernible from the copies—simply truer, richer, better. Yet apparently neither Chardin nor Diderot (who wrote a fascinating article under "Copy" in his *Encyclopédie*) ever considered that verisimilitude and truth were not the same thing: that a painting was not only a copy of nature but also a fact of nature in its own right, a registration of an unrepeatable experience.

In the last analysis, I think it must also be admitted that Diderot with all his much-vaunted "love of divulgation" never really gets to the bottom of Boucher either. He never giggles or even smiles at Boucher, though Boucher's amassing of carnal hyperbole would seem to conduce to laughter or at least to a bafflement akin to laughter. To me, Boucher verges upon his own parody, which is why he cannot be parodied; he does not invite serious contemplation. What can you say about a swan's neck inching lasciviously up Leda's tummy, or Mme de Bergeret garnished with fifty-three cabbage roses, but—respectively—"How frightfully naughty!" and "How too too divine!" And then Boucher is such a painterly opportunist: if there are nanny goats in his picture he must show their teats, and if he shows their teats each one must have its highlight, plink-plink-plink. The whole manner, with its snappy, oversaturated colors and easy com-

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positional devices, seems fundamentally unserious, predictably running to "godfearing skies" and "hotspots," "farkles," and "zits" —illustrators' terms for standardized lighting effects. Like a modern-day virtuoso illustrator, Boucher offers mostly canned imagery; there is usually a little pink mixed in with all the other tones like a preservative—the sort of pink that Sèvres fanciers call *rose Pompadour*.

What is so odd is that the man who wrote *Rameau's Nephew* never considered that Boucher might be a deliberate dissembler, a "sincere liar" in paint. Indeed, he expected a sort of verism from Boucher that would have been as misplaced in his painting as forthright truth-telling would have been in Rameau's nephew's palaver. Boucher simply doesn't care—except in the pictures I have noted, and a few others like them—for resemblances. That is why almost none of his faces are psychologically interesting—they are all of a Betty-and-Veronica blandness—and he scarcely bothered to get a likeness in his portraits. Any genuine accuracies would only have pointed up the mass of remaining disparities, drawn attention to the degree of transposition—everything made lighter, brighter, softer—in his formulaic style. Just as in Chardin's paintings everything tends to look dry and crumbly, so in Boucher's everything looks slathery and deliquescent, as if reverting to the saps from which turpentine, oil, and varnish are primally extracted. Something in Boucher refuses to play the reliable, decent chap, and his fondness for slippery fibs delights the prevaricator in us all.

Travesty or transvestism is a common theme in Boucher, but he offers not sexual crossovers but crossovers from maturity to innocence or from urban aristocracy to pastoral simplicity: one thinks of the children gussied up as artists and *philosophes* in the Frick Collection's pale blue Boucher room, or the *enfants jardiniers* on the tapestry chairs at Osterley. In such images as these we are encouraged to recognize ourselves as children pursuing our chosen diversions out of the way of sin and pain and degradation: we are encouraged to indulge and to forgive ourselves. This sense of self-indulgence, of being able to forgive the part of our conduct that we also deride, is supposed to be at the heart of the "eighteenth-century sense of humor" such as the Edwardians rediscovered it. In the land of eighteenth-century humor one can never be worse than "frightfully naughty" or better than "too too divine," and that, perhaps, is why it all seems so far away. That too is why we have left François Boucher, the prototypical hare of art, so lamentably far behind us—his prodigious leaps seen only through the telescope of time.

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Debating the humanities at Yale

by Roger Kimball

Early this April, the Whitney Humanities Center at Yale University sponsored a one-day, public symposium entitled "The Humanities and the Public Interest." The symposium convened at nine o'clock on a Saturday morning and consisted of three sessions. The purpose of the event, in the words of a University press release, was "to re-examine the traditional association between the study of the humanities and the guardianship of humanistic values in the context of contemporary American society." Peter Brooks, director of the Whitney Humanities Center and professor of the humanities at Yale, expanded on this: "The symposium will ask whether the case for the humanities can rest on traditional assumptions," he was quoted in the press release as saying, "or whether a new rationale is needed if the humanities are to claim a major place in contemporary modes of thought and analysis."

One might think this a tall order for a single day's discussion. But the Yale community proved itself undaunted by the prospect. Even the symposium's first session, which was devoted to "Technology in the Humanities, the Humanities in Technology," drew an audience of over a hundred people; and the second two sessions—"The Social Mission of the Humanities" in the late morning and "A New Rationale for the Humanities?" after lunch—both filled the house with an audience of some three hundred or more. Each session featured two speakers and two respondents, with a member of the Yale faculty serving as moderator.

The symposium opened with some introductory remarks by Professor Brooks, who noted that the original impetus for the symposium was Secretary of Education William J. Bennett's report on higher education in the humanities, *To Reclaim a Legacy*. Though it appears over Secretary Bennett's name, the report is in effect a committee document. It reflects the findings and recommendations—and also, one feels, the concessions and compromises—of a study group that included some thirty teachers, administrators, and experts on higher education. Undertaken when Secretary Bennett was chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the thirty-two-page pamphlet was published by the Endowment in November, 1984, and has excited considerable consternation in the academy. In part, this is because the report criticizes the way in which the humanities are being taught—or left untaught—in many American colleges and universities. But more importantly, the report has been controversial because of the frankly conservative vision of the humanities that informs its analysis.

In brief, *To Reclaim a Legacy* defends precisely those "traditional assumptions" of the humanities that Professor Brooks hoped the Yale symposium would question. For himself, Professor Brooks declared his "profound disagreement" with the conclusions and general outlook of Secretary Bennett's

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report, taking issue especially with what he described as its "intellectual fundamentalism." Professor Brooks's opening remarks were very brief, but in many ways they established the tenor for the day's discussion; and since he identified Secretary Bennett's report as the catalyst for the symposium, we may begin by taking a closer look at its argument.

To Reclaim a Legacy begins by reaffirming the traditional role of the humanities as the chief instrument of our cultural self-definition. Its presiding deity is Matthew Arnold, whose faith in the ennobling effects of high culture, of "the best that has been thought and said," is patent throughout the report. Elaborating Arnold's famous phrase, Secretary Bennett describes the humanities as "the best that has been said, thought, written, and otherwise expressed about the human experience." The humanities are important, he writes, because

> they tell us how men and women of our own and other civilizations have grappled with life's enduring, fundamental questions: What is justice? What should be loved? What deserves to be defended? What is courage? What is noble? What is base? . . .
>
> These questions are not simply diversions for intellectuals or playthings for the idle. As a result of the ways in which these questions have been answered, civilizations have emerged, nations have developed, wars have been fought, and people have lived contentedly or miserably.

Against the background of this faith in the importance of the humanities, the statistics that are marshaled in *To Reclaim a Legacy* cannot but give one pause. For example, according to Secretary Bennett, since 1970 the number of students majoring in the humanities has declined by about half, by nearly two-thirds in the case of history. Similarly, fewer than half of all colleges and universities now require foreign language study for the bachelor's degree—down from ninety percent in 1966, we read—and a student can now graduate from seventy-five percent of our colleges and universities without having studied European history, from eighty-six percent without having studied classical Greece and Rome, and from seventy-two percent without having studied American literature or history. In other words, in the past two decades American higher education has suffered a wholesale flight from the humanities.

But the source of the controversy surrounding Secretary Bennett's report does not lie in its litany of dispiriting statistics. The real issue lies rather in his prescriptions for "reclaiming" the legacy he finds threatened and, in the end, in his understanding of the substance and definition of that legacy. In the simplest terms, he calls for a reshaping of undergraduate curricula "based on a clear vision of what constitutes an educated person." In his view, the goal of the humanities should be a "common culture" rooted in the highest ideals and aspirations of the Western tradition. Thus, while he urges the study of other cultures, he asserts that "the core of the American college curriculum . . . should be the civilization of the West . . . ." Along the way, Secretary Bennett also criticizes the widespread tendency to politicize the humanities, to make them "the handmaiden of ideology," as well as the penchant for radical subjectivism that would have us view the meaning and value of the humanities as intractably relative. Indeed, central to Secretary Bennett's view of the humanities is an adherence to traditional criteria and standards for educational excellence and scholarly accomplishment. He believes, for example, that the tradition provides us with a generally recognized canon or body of "great works" that should form the basis for a humanistic education. And though he acknowledges that there will always be differences of opinion about the details of this canon, he insists that its basic lineaments are clear and ought to be preserved.

Despite accusations to the contrary, Secretary Bennett does not advocate restoration of a previous state of affairs. He insists that the solution to the current crisis in the humanities "is not a return to an earlier

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time when the classical curriculum was the only curriculum and college was available to only a privileged few." Given the charges of elitism and reaction that his proposals have occasioned, it seems well to emphasize this point. "American higher education today serves far more people . . . than it did a century ago," Secretary Bennett writes.

> Its increased accessibility to women, racial and ethnic minorities, recent immigrants, and students of limited means is a positive accomplishment of which our nation is justly proud . . . . But our eagerness to assert the virtues of pluralism should not allow us to sacrifice the principle that formerly lent substance and continuity to the curriculum, namely, that each college and university should recognize and accept its vital role as a conveyor of the accumulated wisdom of our civilization.

It is of course this final affirmation that has troubled Secretary Bennett's opponents. For one thing, who decides what counts as "the accumulated wisdom of our civilization"? In Arnold's terms, why should the humanities be concerned primarily with the *best* that has been thought and said? Does that not exclude a large portion of human experience? And does not that mass of experience deserve "equal time" in our institutions of higher education? Here again, who is to say what counts as "best"? Perhaps the Arnoldian injunction has been interpreted too narrowly, too "ideologically," too exclusively? Furthermore, why should the humanities focus so intently upon the past? Why should they not concern themselves as much with the *creation* as with the *preservation* of culture? Such questions are at the heart of Professor Brooks's "profound disagreement" and charge of "intellectual fundamentalism"—a charge that has been loudly echoed in the academy and that was to be advanced with great zeal that Saturday at Yale's Whitney Humanities Center.

The symposium's first session, however, on technology and the humanities was notable mostly for its lack of focus. Alan Trachtenberg, professor of American Studies and chairman of the American Studies Program at Yale, served as moderator. He opened the session by noting that the antagonism between technology and the humanities has become something of a "cliché." The antagonism might be overcome, he suggested, if we were to invert the terms of the discussion and try to show how technology and the humanities are at bottom "interrelated systems" that point to a "common destiny." This sounds lovely, of course—who wouldn't wish to show that the rationalistic imperatives of modern science and technology are somehow compatible with the intrinsically value-laden life of the humanities? Unfortunately, though, Professor Trachtenberg failed to specify what it might mean for technology and the humanities to be "interrelated systems," and in default of such specification his dream of their "common destiny" can be little more than wishful thinking. Clichés rarely provide one with an "interesting" interpretation of phenomena, but it sometimes happens that they express an obvious truth.

The principal speakers in this first session were Elting Morison, professor emeritus at MIT, and Daniel C. Dennett, professor of philosophy at Tufts University. Professor Morison offered us some rather commonplace reflections on the disintegration of the "received scheme of things" in the modern world and on the academy's accompanying shift away from the humanities as traditionally conceived toward more technical subjects. In a formidable phrase that captured the imagination of the other speakers, he called for the establishment of a "laboratory for the study of epistemological disorders" that could bring the humanities and technology together. Professor Dennett read part of a paper on ethics in which he discussed some of the special ethical quandaries with which our modern, technological society confronts us. He was especially concerned with analyzing the increased moral responsibility we feel in the face of our greater knowledge of the world's miseries. Given that knowledge and our immense

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technical capabilities, he asked, where does our responsibility end? At the same time, he criticized our "misbegotten reliance" on technology and—in the session's second arresting phrase—lobbied for "a moral first-aid kit" that would be more responsive to particular ethical problems.

The respondents added little to the discussion. Jules Chametsky, professor of English and director of the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities at the University of Massachusetts, wondered whether Professor Dennett's proposals were capable of addressing "real problems" and made the novel observation that the prospect of a nuclear holocaust weighs heavily on modern consciousness. Professor Chametsky also offered us some wandering reflections on the moral wisdom expressed in Wallace Shawn's play *Aunt Dan and Lemon* and concluded by noting that in "Reagan's America" it is difficult to make the humanities "relevant." The other respondent in the first session was Leo Marx, professor of American cultural history at MIT. Professor Marx began by reminding us how difficult it is to establish compelling criteria for moral action. He liked the notion of a "laboratory for epistemological disorders," he told us, but in general felt that the proposals made that morning were too "sanitized," too abstract and detached from real-life problems. He emphasized the "embedded" quality of moral problems, observing that for moral guidance most people rely not on abstract cogitation but on inherited belief systems. The real function of the humanities, he suggested, was not to provide us with "instrumental values" but to help us distinguish and discriminate among belief systems, to reflect critically on inherited values.

While the question of the relation between technology and the humanities is undoubtedly a pressing one, the contributions that morning rarely proceeded beyond assorted—and often dubious—platitudes, on the one hand, and fairly abstract speculation about ethics, on the other. The discussion became considerably more concrete in the second, and most publicized, session of the symposium, "The Social Mission of the Humanities." This session featured a "dialogue" between Yale President A. Bartlett Giamatti and Norman Podhoretz, the well-known writer and editor of *Commentary* magazine; the respondents were Henry Rosovsky, professor of social science at Harvard, and Cornel West, associate professor of the philosophy of religion at the Yale Divinity School. It was in this session that the real issues facing the humanities in contemporary American society were most clearly set forth.

Mr. Podhoretz spoke first. The humanities, he said, cannot be justified on practical grounds. Because the knowledge and culture they represent are "good in themselves," their ultimate justification is simply their intrinsic value. From this it follows that the humanities cannot directly help us in the formulation of public policy; nor do they yield any particular political position; nor indeed does acquaintance with the humanities necessarily make us morally more upright or more humane—think only of the cultivated Nazi commandants who also savored Mozart. Echoing the sentiments expressed in Secretary Bennett's report, Mr. Podhoretz identified the chief function of the humanities to be the creation of a "common culture." Central to this view of the humanities is the idea of a more or less generally recognized canon of works that define the tradition. Mr. Podhoretz admitted that there will always be disagreement about the composition of the canon at, as it were, its edges; but he claimed that, at least until recently, there has been a widely shared consensus about the core body of works that constitute "the best that has been thought and said."

In one sense, of course, this view of the humanities can be said to be exclusive or "elitist," since it presupposes a rigorously defined notion of what it means to be an educated person. But in another sense, it is deeply democratic, for it locates authority not in any class or race or sex, but in a tradition before which all are equal. Indeed, as Mr. Podhoretz observed, to the extent that

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the humanities are crucial to the maintenance of civilized life, it is essential that as many people as possible be exposed to the canon: only thus is high culture preserved and transmitted. Furthermore, as the transmitter of the canon, of what Mr. Podhoretz described as our "intellectual patrimony," the humanities have traditionally instilled a sense of the value of the democratic tradition we have inherited. And it is in this respect, he noted, that the humanities *do* have a political dimension, insofar as they rest upon a belief in the value and importance of Western culture and the civilization that gave birth to it.

With the social and political upheaval of the Sixties and early Seventies, Mr. Podhoretz continued, this entire conception of the humanities came under radical assault. Not only the idea of a common culture founded upon a recognized canon of great works, but the very notion of a politically autonomous realm of culture, was dismissed as naïve, ethnocentric, or somehow repressive. Even the fundamental belief in the value of Western culture and civilization—the value, that is to say, of the whole humanistic enterprise—was undermined. And while it is true that the more extreme manifestations of this revolt have disappeared, Mr. Podhoretz maintained that the radical attitudes espoused in the Sixties and Seventies live on in attenuated form in the academy—even, or rather especially, in the humanistic disciplines, in the values and assumptions that typically inform the teaching and study of the humanities. For the most part, he said, a study of the humanities now tends at best to encourage a feeling of "mild contempt" for culture as traditionally defined and at worst to inspire outright hatred of our civilization and everything it stands for. And because of this sedimented radicalism in the academy, the humanities, however much they may still add to an individual's enlightenment and culture, no longer really contribute to the common good.

It cannot be said that Mr. Podhoretz's diagnosis was sympathetically received. I overheard the idea of a "common culture," for example, variously described as "moribund," "imperialistic," and "fascist." It was considered to be equally "sexist," I gathered, judging from the knowing looks that his use of the phrase "intellectual patrimony" occasioned. President Giamatti began by telling us that he found Mr. Podhoretz's talk "internally contradictory," for is there not a contradiction between asserting the essentially private nature of the humanities and then lamenting that they no longer conduce to the commonweal? In fact, though, President Giamatti's charge depended upon distorting Mr. Podhoretz's description of the humanities. It is one thing to say that the humanities cannot be justified on instrumental grounds, as Mr. Podhoretz did, quite another to say that they are a private affair entirely without social consequence, which no one but President Giamatti thought to propose.

The President of Yale University, himself a scholar of Renaissance literature, also came out strongly against the idea of a canon. Instead, he thought that the humanities should encourage "modes of thinking that would discipline the imagination without pretending to direct it"—the idea being, I suppose, that it doesn't much matter what one learns so long as one learns something. President Giamatti even claimed that this was the "Greek view" of education. Perhaps he meant the view current in contemporary Greece; certainly, the idea that education should seek "to discipline the imagination without pretending to direct it" is completely foreign to the teachings of Plato and Aristotle—think, for example, of the quite definite ideas that Plato had about what should and should not be taught in his discussion of education in the third book of *The Republic*. But leaving the Greek view of education to one side, President Giamatti's reservations about the importance of the canon do help us understand his central charge against Mr. Podhoretz: that his view of the humanities is "solipsistic" and "spiritually selfish." Basically, President Giamatti presented Mr. Podhoretz as an elitist who

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wanted to keep culture for himself. But as I understand it, the real difference between them was that Mr. Podhoretz wanted the *humanities* to be as widely available as possible, whereas President Giammatti was happy with what we might call universal schooling—the substance, the content, of what was taught was for him more or less up for grabs.

If nothing else, President Giamatti exemplified the strategy that Henry Rosovky, the session's first respondent, identified as the prime imperative for academic administrators—"Be vague." Professor Rosovsky, himself a social scientist, began his response with some amusing reflections on the difference between the humanities and the social sciences. For example, he found it "very humanistic" that there should be no formal papers at the session; and thinking over the discrepancy in income and prestige between faculty in the social sciences and the humanities, he couldn't but wonder whether the true social mission of the humanities "may in fact be sacrificial." About the humanities themselves, Professor Rosovsky suggested that their hallmark was "an eternal dissatisfaction," that they ought in fact to "engender a kind of dissatisfaction," and hence that they "should not be conservative." Against Mr. Podhoretz's vision of a "common culture," Professor Rosovsky sided with President Giamatti in questioning the desirability of adhering to a canon and in extolling the ideal of a "multi-culture" nourished by disparate sources and traditions.

But the most articulate, as well as the most histrionic, response to Mr. Podhoretz came from the Yale Divinity School Professor Cornel West. Professor West's performance, approximating the fervor of a political rally or revival meeting, clearly won the hearts and minds of the Yale audience. They thrilled to his rhetoric, punctuating his impassioned speech with enthusiastic applause. Professor West warmed up with a few words about "decolonization," "the eclipse of European dominance" in the world, and the disintegration of "white, male, WASP hegemony" in the academy. (I had thought that WASPs were white by definition, but no matter: "white, male, WASP hegemony" has an edifying ring to it.) He pictured the evolution of the humanities in recent years as a reflection of a world-wide struggle for freedom against what it has pleased him to describe elsewhere as "the final fruits of bourgeois humanism: North Atlantic ethnocentrism."[1]

In Professor West's view, the "collapsing consensus" that Mr. Podhoretz spoke of tokened not decline but liberation. The Sixties, far from being a debacle, was a "watershed" for the humanities. For one thing, the "onslaught" of popular culture that began then has helped undermine elitist notions of high culture. Then, too, the attention lavished on the history and literature of blacks, women, peasants, and other groups has revealed the traditional canon to be the biased, ethnocentric construction that it is. Hence the "self-contempt" that Mr. Podhoretz said a study of the humanities tended to instill these days is really "a deeper self-critique" that mirrors important changes in the world ("the eclipse of European dominance," etc.), changes that must be recognized and accommodated "if we are not to blow up the planet."

I hasten to add, though, that in criticizing Mr. Podhoretz, Professor West by no means sought to align himself with President Giamatti. On the contrary, he criticized both men for their "lack of historical sense" and for their conservatism. (The term "conservative," one notes, has degenerated into a negative epithet; in many circles, to describe something or someone as "conservative" is simply a politicized way of signaling one's disapproval.) Distinguishing between the "battle-ridden neoconservatism" of Mr. Podhoretz and the "more charming" conservatism of President Giamatti, Professor West wondered whether the "dynamism" championed by President Giamatti didn't at bot-

1 See his "Afterword: The Politics of American Neo-Pragmatism," in *Post-Analytic Philosophy,* edited by Cornel West and John Rajchman, Columbia University Press, 1985, pp. 259-275.

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tom merely represent "the recovery of highbrow classical humanism." He can rest easy on that score, I think, even if it must be admitted that, in comparison with Professor West's vision of the humanities, President Giamatti's does seem conservative.

To my mind, however, the real clue to Professor West's view came with his celebration of the incorporation of the New Left into the university. Among other things, he championed the New Left for creating "combat zones" that could challenge the entire ethos of bourgeois humanism that stands behind the humanities as traditionally conceived. And taking issue with Mr. Podhoretz's severe criticism of the intellectual, moral, and political effects of the New Left, Professor West described writers like Herbert Marcuse and the post-World War II French Marxists as "the best of Western civilization."

Now, it is worth pausing for a moment over Professor West's identification of Herbert Marcuse and the "French Marxists" as representatives of "the best of Western civilization." Just what do these individuals stand for? What have they contributed to furthering the fundamental principles of the humanities? Consider Louis Althusser, one of the most influential among the French Marxists whom Professor West admires. In an interview that he gave in 1968,[2] this example of the "best of Western civilization" explained that he had come to philosophy through his attempt to "become a Communist militant" during and after World War II. Having finally understood that "philosophy is fundamentally *political*"—more specifically, that it is a tool of "class struggle"—Althusser also realized that "it was not easy to resist the spread of contemporary 'humanist' ideology, and bourgeois ideology's other assaults on Marxism." Being an intellectual, a philosopher, made things especially difficult, he confided: "Proletarians have a 'class instinct' which helps them on the way to proletarian 'class positions.' Intellectuals, on the contrary, have a petty-bourgeois class instinct which fiercely resists this transition." Most would agree, however, that Althusser succeeded rather well in overcoming the specified resistance, even if he finally fell prey to "contemporary humanist ideology" when he confessed to murdering his wife in 1980. In any case, it is quite clear that Althusser's view of intellectual life is deeply inimical to the ideal of disinterested scholarly inquiry, an ideal that is at the heart of the humanist tradition.

Then there is Marcuse. One could turn to any number of his works for an introduction to his view of the value of the humanities—to the "Political Preface" that he added to the 1966 edition of *Eros and Civilization,* for example, where he calls for a thoroughgoing revolt against "the political machine, the corporate machine, the cultural and educational machine" of "affluent Western society." What he calls for, in short, is a revolt against just those political, social, and intellectual traditions that define the humanistic endeavor. But perhaps the best précis of Marcuse's thinking about such matters is to be found in his notorious 1965 essay, "Repressive Tolerance."[3] Unable to deny that modern Western democracies offer their citizens an unparalleled degree of personal and political liberty, Marcuse is nevertheless able to denounce the West as essentially "totalitarian" by the simple device of declaring its brand of liberty "repressive" and a product of "false consciousness." (What a versatile tool of obfuscation the notion of "false consciousness" has been, utterly exempt from subservience to mere "empirical reality"!) Indeed, he offers a simple formula for distinguishing between the "repressive tolerance" that expresses itself in the real world in such phenomena as freedom of speech and freedom of assembly and the "liberating tolerance" that would seem to occur chiefly in his imagination: "Liber-

2 "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon," reprinted in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays,* translated by Ben Brewster, Monthly Review Press, 1971, pp. 11-22.

3 Reprinted in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance,* by Robert Paul Wolff, *et alia,* Beacon Press, 1969, pp. 81-123.

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ating tolerance," he writes, "would mean intolerance against movements from the Right, and toleration of movements from the Left."

In brief, then, what Marcuse wants is "not 'equal' but *more* representation of the Left," and he blithely sanctions "extralegal means if the legal ones have proved to be inadequate." In one of the more extraordinary passages of the essay, Marcuse admits that "extreme suspension of the right of free speech and free assembly is indeed justified only if the whole of society is in extreme danger," but continues immediately to note that

> I maintain that our society is in such an emergency situation, . . . Different opinions and "philosophies" can no longer compete peacefully for adherence and persuasion on rational grounds: the "marketplace of ideas" is organized and delimited by those who determine the national and the individual interest. In this society, for which the ideologists have proclaimed the "end of ideology," the false consciousness has become the general consciousness—from the government down to its last objects.

There is no escape, apparently—unless of course one happens to be blessed, as Marcuse believed himself to be, with the "true consciousness" that allows one to penetrate such nearly universal mendacity.

It is in the context of such passages from Professor West's intellectual heroes, I believe, that we must understand the conception of freedom that underlies his view of the humanities. Like his heroes, Professor West finds the "ideology of pluralism" suspect because it "domesticates" radical thought. And like them, too, he questions the traditional "bourgeois" notion of the citizen as a "bearer of rights." Instead, he lobbies for an idea of citizenship that would incorporate "collective action," that would "undermine the liberal protection of rights" in favor of a more encompassing ideal. In response to an objection from Mr. Podhoretz, Professor West admitted that the New Left faced the "temptation" to nihilism and totalitarianism. But he did not seem to think the temptation very serious, and stressed the promise of freedom over such obstacles. Given the record of utopian thinking in this century, however, Oscar Wilde's boast that he could resist anything but temptation seems perhaps less a piece of wit than a solemn admonition.

Since the second session of Yale's symposium on the humanities and the public interest had sought to dispose of the traditional rationale for the humanities, it seemed only appropriate that the final session should address itself to the question of formulating a new rationale for its discredited predecessor. The session was moderated by Professor Brooks, and featured presentations by Jonathan Culler, professor of English and comparative literature at Cornell University, and Vincent Scully, professor of the history of art at Yale. Responding to Professors Culler and Scully were Carolyn G. Heilbrun, professor of English at Columbia University, and J. Hillis Miller, professor of English and comparative literature at Yale.

Professor Culler began by criticizing the traditional rationale for the humanities as "universalist" and "foundationalist." The pretension to be "universalist," he said, was primarily a political consideration: the humanities as traditionally conceived had presumed to speak universally to the human condition, but had in fact represented a narrow "white male" viewpoint. The attempt to be "foundationalist" involves epistemological considerations: the humanities had pretended to provide a foundation for both thought and values, but radical criticism in the last decades had exposed the fictional, and ideologically motivated, ground of that pretense. Professor Culler did not, however, attempt to formulate the new rationale for the humanities that he demanded, but merely offered a list of "divided imperatives" that he thought the humanities ought to heed. The list was fairly vague, even banal, unfortunately—the humanities ought to "assume unity" but also assert the value of

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other cultures, and so on—though it was full of appropriately combative rhetoric and wonderful-sounding, Nietzschean proclamations like his suggestion that thought really becomes valuable "only when it is extreme."

As an example of the kind of retrograde thinking he disparaged, Professor Culler cited a letter he had recently received from a dean at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, inviting him to lecture there. St. John's offers a traditional "great books" curriculum—tailored to include classic developments in modern science and mathematics—and the dean, explaining the nature of the curriculum, described it as based on the "greatest books" of the Western tradition. This Professor Culler and his audience found quite risible, for after all what did the good dean from St. John's mean by the "greatest books"? Only books written by "white Western males before 1900," of course, something that for Professor Culler seemed to demonstrate how parochial—not to say ethnocentric and sexist—his correspondent's notion of education must be. (For the record, one does read women authors and beyond 1900 at St. John's.) Professor Culler never really specified his own idea of a good college curriculum. But one can bet that it wouldn't be "ethnocentric"—indeed, it's not even clear that it would be anthropocentric, since Professor Culler wondered in passing whether a view of the humanities based exclusively on a study of mankind wouldn't be guilty of "speciesism."

Mercifully, Professor Culler did not pursue this absurdity, though it was taken up by Vincent Scully, who began his talk by suggesting that what we needed was not so much a new rationale for the humanities as a new rationale for "animality." Professor Scully then treated us to a slide show that opened, as such slide shows must, with a picture of the snow shovel Marcel Duchamp presented as a work of art in 1915. What won't be taken as a work of art today, Professor Scully reflected, and then went on to share with his audience a number of other truly novel ideas: that the movies and television have emerged as the dominant style of modern life, for example, or that the artist must be "open-minded, pluralistic, poised for surprise." One began to understand why Professor Scully is most successful in a lecture hall full of undergraduates: when entertainment with a dash of edification about the wonderfulness of art is the goal, one needn't worry about the details.

Carolyn Heilbrun began her response on a melancholy note by observing that even now, even at a symposium on the humanities at Yale in 1986, she was the only woman on the panel. And I was surprised, I must confess, that Professor Brooks could have made this blunder. Surely he must have known that such a discrepancy in numbers would be held up for criticism. And as an academic administrator, he must also have known that the important thing in such situations is not to get the appropriate speakers for the occasion but to assemble a panel with the correct ethnic, social, and sexual mix. In any case, Professor Heilbrun went on to note that, though she was also the oldest person on the panel, it was the symposium's youngest representatives, Professors Culler and West, who spoke for her. She, too, believed that college should "teach us to be dissatisfied" and that thought is really valuable only when it is extreme. In addition, as the panel's official feminist, she also told us that it is the questions that women can ask about the canon that are the important questions. Why only women can ask them, or indeed, what the important ones might be, she didn't really say. Nevertheless, one got a pretty good idea of the kind of thing she had in mind when she criticized Professor Scully for presenting Michelangelo's depiction of the creation of man as representative of the human condition. After all, both God and Adam were—well, there's no getting around it: they were male, and how universal can that be?

After all this, J. Hillis Miller cannot be blamed for failing to add much to the discussion: by this time, the fashionable positions had all been staked out. Professor Miller has proved himself an expert at cre-

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atively adapting fashionable positions, however, and in his talk he adroitly elaborated on several of the day's themes. Above all, he warned against attempting simply to reimpose the traditional canon and proposed, as a kind of compromise, a curriculum in which canonical works would be read alongside "non-canonical" ones. What seemed crucial to him—and this was an idea that appealed to a good number of speakers that day—was not so much the teaching of particular texts or subjects as the teaching of "reading" in general.

The session, and the symposium, ended with a few comments and questions. Two comments in particular stuck with me. The first was Professor Heilbrun's assertion that our reading of texts is inescapably "ideological." And the second was Professor Brooks's concluding observation that, because the humanities are "inherently subversive," the recent developments in the academy that people like Secretary Bennett and Mr. Podhoretz bemoan ought actually be taken as signs of health. Together, the comments seemed to me to epitomize the proceedings in New Haven that day, and it may be well to conclude by considering them in a bit more detail.

The idea that all reading is "ideological" has gained great currency in literary studies in recent years. Among other things, it implies that we are imprisoned by our point of view, that our language, our social or ethnic background, or our sex inescapably condition the way we understand things. But are we so imprisoned? Granted that such contingencies *influence* our point of view, do they finally determine it? "Ideologies," as Hannah Arendt observed years ago, are "isms which to the satisfaction of their adherents can explain everything and every occurrence by deducing it from a single premise." In this sense, she notes, an ideology differs from a simple opinion "in that it claims to possess either the key to history, or the solution for all 'riddles of the universe,' or the intimate knowledge of the hidden universal laws which are supposed to rule nature and man."[4] Yet is is precisely this sort of distinction that the contention that all reading is ideological dismisses. It dismisses, in other words, the crucial distinction *between* a point of view and an ideology, between an individual perspective on the world—which *as* a perspective is open to challenge, accommodation, correction—and an *idée fixe.* All in all, what we might call the universalization of ideology underscores the truth of Northrop Frye's observation that "it is a curious tendency in human nature to believe in disillusionment: that is, to think we are nearest the truth when we have established as much falsehood as possible."[5]

And in this context, since Matthew Arnold was invoked, whether as friend or foe, by practically every speaker at the Yale symposium, it is worth mentioning that in "The Function of Criticism" Arnold identifies "disinterestedness" as the chief mark of responsible criticism. Now in describing criticism as "disinterested," Arnold did not mean that it presumes to speak without reference to a particular point of view—though critics of the idea often so caricature it. Rather, he meant a habit of inquiry that keeps "aloof from what is called 'the practical view of things' . . . [b]y steadily refusing to lend itself to any . . . ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas." In modern terms, Arnold looked to criticism to provide a bulwark *against* ideology, against interpretations that are subordinated to essentially political interests. Of course, the ideal of such disinterested criticism is rejected by many contemporary critics as naïve (or worse), though it is not at all clear whether the criticism they practice is more astute than Arnold's or, alas, only more ideological.

Arnold is also useful in appreciating the oft-voiced contention that education ought to instill "dissatisfaction" or, to use Profes-

4 *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973, *seriatim,* pp. 468, 159.

5 "The Realistic Oriole: A Study of Wallace Stevens," in *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology,* Harcourt Brace & World, 1963, p. 244.

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sor Brooks's more dramatic formulation, that the humanities are "inherently subversive." Such sentiments were so widely shared at the Yale symposium that it was almost taken for granted that the function of education is not to impart knowledge but to subvert, to excite "dissatisfaction." Behind this idea is a deep suspicion of authority, a suspicion that, in fact, would have us collapse the distinction between authority and authoritarianism. Yet it is a nice question whether the humanities can survive without recognizing the authority of tradition. It is indeed for this reason that, in "The Literary Influence of Academies," Arnold praised the willing "deference to a standard higher than one's own habitual standard in intellectual matters" as the result of a "sensitiveness of intelligence." And thus it is, too, that Hannah Arendt suggested that "conservatism, in the sense of conservation, is of the essence of the educational activity, whose task is always to cherish and protect something." "The real difficulty in modern education," Arendt wrote,

> lies in the fact that, despite all the fashionable talk about a new conservatism [Arendt was writing in 1958], even that minimum of conservation and the conserving attitude without which education is simply not possible is in our time extraordinarily hard to achieve. There are very good reasons for this. The crisis of authority in education is most closely connected with the crisis of tradition, that is with the crisis in our attitude toward the realm of the past . . . . The problem of education in the modern world lies in the fact that by its very nature it cannot forgo either authority or tradition, and yet it must proceed in a world that is neither structured by authority nor held together by tradition.[6]

6 "The Crisis in Education," reprinted in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought,* Penguin, 1978, pp. 192-3, 195.

"Neither structured by authority nor held together by tradition"—in the end, this would seem to describe the goal of the "new rationale" for the humanities as envisioned at Yale. And of course the real casualties are the students and junior faculty, who often haven't the foggiest notion of the value of the tradition they have been taught to disparage. The senior faculty are at least old enough to recognize what it is they are abandoning. Champions of the "new rationale" like to pretend that they are merely thinking more critically than the tradition had allowed. In fact, though, they have as often as not degenerated from criticism to nihilism. Indeed, the whole situation reminds one of nothing so much as of Turgenev's portrait of the nihilist Bazarov in *Fathers and Sons*:

> "A nihilist," said Nikolai Petrovich. "That comes from the Latin *nihil—nothing,* I imagine; the term must signify a man who . . . who recognizes nothing?"
>
> "Say—who respects nothing," put in Pavel Petrovich, and set to work with the butter again.
>
> "Who looks at everything critically," observed Arcady.
>
> "Isn't that exactly the same thing?" asked Pavel Petrovich.
>
> "No, it's not the same thing. A nihilist is a person who does not take any principle for granted, however much that principle may be revered."

The humanities had once striven to inculcate the ability to think critically, that is, to enable one to discriminate between ideology and a point of view, between legitimate authority and authoritarianism, between genuine freedom and its tyrannical parody. The "new rationale" propounded at Yale would have us believe that thinking critically is indistinguishable from Bazarov's nihilism.

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Naum Gabo at the Guggenheim

by Eric Gibson

The term "Constructivism" is one of the most unstable in the modernist lexicon. Broadly speaking, it describes sculpture that is made by joining discrete masses into open-form, usually abstract compositions. It differs from traditional sculptural methods which require the artist to cut away (as in carving) or build up (as in modeling) his materials so that they form a self-contained, monolithic mass. The Constructivist method was initiated by Picasso in the open-form sculptures he produced in the years immediately preceding the First World War. Extending into three dimensions the formal premises of his paintings of the period, Picasso used cardboard, sheet metal, and other materials to represent a particular object—the most famous is his *Guitar* of 1911-12—by reconstituting its elements into a series of open, overlapping planes. As a result, a new role was assigned to space in defining our perception of sculptural volume. Picasso's innovations in this field were taken up by scores of later sculptors, the most distinguished among them being Julio González, David Smith, Anthony Caro, and Mark di Suvero.

There is another Constructivist tradition, however, which tracks a different artistic course. It, too, grew out of Picasso's sculpture, but evolved in Russia in the Revolutionary period largely under the leadership of Vladimir Tatlin. On a trip to Paris in 1913, Tatlin saw some of Picasso's constructed reliefs in the artist's studio, and on returning home immediately set to work in developing his own version of this new sculptural genre. He thus laid the groundwork for what was to become the Russian form of Constructivism.

Despite the debt which this new sculptural genre owed to Cubism, and, incidentally, to Futurism as well—examples of which were readily accessible in Russia at the time—the Russian avant-garde made something very different out of it. In the Constructivist vision as it evolved in pre- and post-Revolutionary Russia, the artist came to be regarded as an indispensable agent in the creation—or rather, the *construction*—of a new and better (by which was meant a socialist) society. And while these new Constructivists made use of Cubism's vocabulary of open forms and its syntax of interlocking planes, they did so in an entirely nonobjective style. The materials used by the Constructivists were hailed for their superior "reality"—their congruence with the world of everyday things—and were employed in compositions which rejected whatever had remained of Cubism's illusionism. The new Constructivism attempted to remove the barriers separating the actual space of the viewer from the virtual space of the work of art. Out of this approach Tatlin evolved his doctrine of the "culture of materials," which enjoined the artist to exploit the characteristic properties of his materials (one of these materials being space itself). Thus, while Cubist construction was exclusively an aesthetic matter,

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with no concern beyond its artistic realization, its Russian counterpart, fired by a utopian vision, embodied an entire social ethos.

It is to this Russian branch of Constructivism that Naum Gabo, whose retrospective was lately seen at the Guggenheim, belongs.[1] Gabo's place in the Russian avant-garde was rather an equivocal one, however. He was abroad from 1911 to 1917, so his artistic outlook was formed on his own, outside the Russian avant-garde movements which flourished at the time. Shortly after his return to Russia in 1917, moreover, he led the split away from Tatlin's group, which advocated a purely utilitarian, propagandistic role for art. In his *Realistic Manifesto* of 1920, Gabo advocated an art that addressed itself exclusively to the spirit, maintaining that such an art need not be incompatible with the aims of social and political reform. The "publication" of the manifesto—it was posted in places formerly reserved for decrees from the Czar—coincided with the only public exhibition Gabo ever had in Russia, an exhibition organized by himself. One might expect that, having seized the initiative in this way, Gabo would have moved into a position of leadership within the avant-garde. But this was not the case. He remained aloof, as he always had been, participating in discussions and debates at the VKhUTEMAS —State Free Art Studios—in Moscow but accepting no official position there. His open break with the utilitarian Constructivists notwithstanding, Gabo never disavowed the Constructivist movement's emphasis on modern materials, its view of the Constructivist idea as emblematic of the modern age—nor, for that matter, its utopian vision.

Despite Gabo's equivocal relationship to the Russian avant-garde, it is against the backdrop of its personalities and events that his work needs to be understood. His sculpture constitutes a kind of dialogue between the opposing attractions of orthodox Constructivism's public voice and the private, very different dictates of an inward sensibility. For Gabo brought something personal and extra-artistic to the avant-garde circles of Russia at this time—an interest in the new discoveries concerning space and time in physics, and an ardent desire to give them artistic expression. In Gabo's mind, these discoveries represented the defining issues of the modern era, and no contemporary art claiming to represent the spirit of the time, he felt, could afford to ignore them.

Gabo is one of the few members of the Russian avant-garde to have made anything enduring from Constructivism once outside the white heat of the Revolutionary environment. Yet in spite of his importance, past retrospectives of his work—the last one was nearly twenty years ago—have been hampered by serious difficulties because much of his work was lost, partially disassembled, poorly restored, or withheld from exhibition. More than is usually the case, therefore, this retrospective represents a concerted effort to unlock the many mysteries surrounding Gabo and to present as nearly as possible a definitive account of the artist. Works have been retrieved from obscurity and restored. (*Constructed Head No. 1*, Gabo's first constructed sculpture, is exhibited for the first time in half a century.) Elaborate research and documentation have also been undertaken to put the Gabo *oeuvre* in order.

There is one omission worth commenting upon, however. That is the important *Hanging Construction* of 1959 from the Baltimore Museum of Art. Installed in a stairwell in that museum, where it is attached to the ceiling, this sculpture is the realization of longstanding ideas concerning the use of a staircase to afford continuous, changing

1 "Naum Gabo: Sixty Years of Constructivism" opened at the Guggenheim Museum on March 6 and closed on April 27. The exhibition, organized by Dr. Steven A. Nash, Deputy Director and Chief Curator of the Dallas Museum of Art, was previously shown at the Dallas Museum of Art, where it opened in September 1985, and the Art Gallery of Ontario. It now travels to West Berlin, Düsseldorf, and London, where it will have its final showing from February 11 to April 20, 1987 at the Tate Gallery. A catalogue with essays by Dr. Nash, Christina Lodder, and Jörn Merkert, is available for $26.

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perspectives of a single work. At fifteen feet in height, it would have looked superb in the well of the Guggenheim's rotunda, and would have offered viewers making their way down the ramp their one complete experience of a critical element in Gabo's aesthetic: dynamic motion in space experienced through time. As the show was mounted—with many of Gabo's works backed into the bays that form the museum's temporary exhibition space—the viewer could glimpse this aspect of Gabo only sporadically and imperfectly.

Gabo's artistic career is one of very definite highs and lows. During the decade 1915-1925—the time of his debut as a mature artist—he produced work in which there is scarcely a false note. This phase coincides with his wartime residence in Norway, his return to Russia and involvement with the avant-garde, and his later sojourns in Berlin and Paris. If one knew nothing of the artist who made the work of this period, one would easily conclude that he had spent all those years in a basement studio, so steady and assured is his achievement.

During the following two decades, however, this consistency diminishes, until by 1950 it becomes clear that Gabo's career as an innovative artist is effectively over—a fact tacitly acknowledged by Steven A. Nash in his catalogue essay, where scant consideration is given to this concluding phase of Gabo's career. The art of these years turned lifeless as the artist began thinking more and more in terms of monumental public sculpture. As a result of this dramatic falling off, the Guggenheim exhibition ends—inevitably—in anticlimax.

Gabo's first sculptures, composed of interlocking planes and entitled *Constructed Heads,* are often thought to constitute critiques of comparable Cubist sculptures by Picasso, work of the sort Tatlin had seen in 1913. In fact, they are critiques of sculpture in general—of the traditional closed monolith—as well as manifestos for the new, more modern form of three-dimensional expression Gabo envisioned. In 1913 he had gone on a walking tour through Italy but had been unable to respond enthusiastically to what he had seen, feeling it was "dead" and that consequently, "something ha[d] to be done in sculpture." The *Constructed Heads* are Gabo's answer to this quandary.

Although derived to some degree from the contemporary geometric abstraction Gabo would have seen in Munich and Paris, these early sculptures reflect more directly his studies of engineering, one of many subjects he turned to after studying medicine for a while in Munich. In particular they draw on principles of structural engineering, using thin planes to create volume with the minimum of mass, just as steel-girder construction does. At the same time they show Gabo's new attitude toward the role of space in sculpture. Like Tatlin, Gabo considered Cubism to be inherently "false"—an illusion—and believed that space in sculpture had to become more "real." But unlike Tatlin, Gabo was not aiming at a metaphor for a new social reality. Rather, he wished to express the spirit of the age by taking as his "subject" newly formulated concepts concerning the nature of space and time (e.g., Einstein's theory of relativity).

In *Constructed Head No. 1* and *Constructed Head No. 2*, both from 1915, mass is expressed entirely in terms of interior structure, where volume is suggested by the linear contours of the plane edges. With the figure opened up so thoroughly, interior space—articulated by planes—is revealed in order to fuse with the surrounding, literal space of the viewer.

In spite of this bold approach to problems of sculptural language, and their considerable degree of success, these *Heads* remain tied to the past in important respects. Because the plane edges defining the volume of the figure imply a skin around it, Gabo reveals only an *interior* space, a space permanently separated from ambient space. The *Constructed Heads* thus fall short of that direct relationship between actual and aesthetic space which Tatlin achieved at about this time in his own reliefs, where metal rods

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project directly off the background plane and out into the space of the room. Ironically, Gabo's sculptures are set off from ambient space in a way that is very much akin to the Renaissance sculpture he had felt such antipathy toward on his trip to Italy.

A further respect in which the *Constructed Heads* belong to the past is in the play of light and shadow that animates them. This play endows them with a pictorial, *un*-sculptural quality which goes against the greater sculptural purity Gabo was seeking. Finally, *Constructed Head No. 2,* with its folded hands and tilted head, projects a deeply contemplative mood. Dr. Nash accounts for this by alluding to Gabo's affinity for Russian icons—an affinity he shared, as Dr. Nash also points out, with Tatlin, Malevich, and other members of the avant-garde.

Gabo's idea that sculpture should express the new dynamics of space found its earliest successful realization ten years later in *Construction in Space with Balance on Two Points,* one of the pre-eminent works of modern sculpture. Gabo uses celluloid here, a contemporary antecedent of plexiglass. Its transparency makes it appear immaterial and weightless, and helps to reduce sculptural mass. The main portion of the work is a complex of two interlocking cubic volumes placed at forty-five-degree angles. Both are reduced to the barest form. One volume, perpendicular to the sculpture's base, is formed by a vertical, transparent plane bisecting a negative horizontal plane formed only by four black edges. The second volume is made up of four narrow white strips, two attached to one side of the vertical transparent plane of the first volume and two attached to the other side. This structure is then suspended above a semicircular strip resting on its outer, curved edge.

Throughout *Points* there is the barest indication of volume, or even material presence. By opening up the sculpture, and by underscoring the immateriality of the transparent planes, Gabo achieves that free interaction with space that eluded him earlier. So successful is he in this respect, that *Points* engages with space in a manner quite different from any sculpture before it. It goes beyond a simple physical involvement with space in the manner of Picasso and Tatlin and enters a realm in which it is no longer clear where matter ends and space begins. *Points* seems at once to contain space and to be constructed from it, even to move through it while remaining at rest.

Gabo achieves these extraordinary results with a series of deft oppositions. Movement, for example, is suggested by the syncopated rotary motion of the white planes, the zigzag horizontal trajectory of two black edges, the luminescent white edges of the transparent planes, and, finally, by the rotation of the cube structure and balancing support around a central vertical axis. Against this is set an almost classic stasis, achieved by the seemingly weightless suspension of the vertical clear plane and by the position of the entire structure on a single plane edge. The opaque black and white planes seem to affirm the work's material presence; the transparent sheet calls materiality into question.

Points highlights an important aspect of Gabo's art: his commitment to an *aesthetic* realization of his experience of the new scientific reality he perceived around him, one based on line, texture, volume, and, of course, space. This is why one need not be familiar with the science that was so often Gabo's starting point in order to appreciate the work that came out of it. And it remains the key to his enduring importance in an era in which nonaesthetic elements—mechanics and technology among them—have come to play an ever-larger role in art.

During the years between his *Heads* and the making of *Points,* many of Gabo's sculptures and drawings were designed for fountains and other types of monuments. Architecture and monumental sculpture had increasingly made their way to the center of the Constructivist aesthetic. For example, Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International,* never finally built, was to have been an enormous, rotating structure of conference and assembly halls. The appeal of the monument lay partly, of course, in the means it offered of symbolizing and publicly pro-

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claiming the new gospel of utopia. Further, it reflected the Constructivists' changing view of art and of themselves. During the Twenties, they gravitated to architecture, believing it to be the logical extension of the Constructivist method in sculpture. It also fulfilled their image of themselves as builders, common laborers in the forming of a new society—this in contrast to the self-absorbed, bourgeois aesthetes of capitalist society.

Gabo, of course, never shared this utilitarian view of the artist's place in society. But he did subscribe to the utopian ethos, and it is this that explains his commitment to the idea of the monument as a standard part of the repertory of sculpture. The fact is, however, that Gabo was never able to translate his private vision into public sculpture. *Monument for an Airport,* for example, was executed shortly after *Points,* and out of identical materials—black, white, and transparent planes. But how different it is! Wanting to express the concept of dynamic aerial motion, Gabo "floats" the planes above the base and angles them forward, even shaping the transparent forms into parallelograms to suggest forward impulsion. After the quicksilver energy of *Points,* the *Monument for an Airport* communicates all too literally the nature of flight—the lofting of inert, heavy masses with great effort. The transparent planes have none of the weightlessness or immateriality of their counterparts in the earlier sculpture. Nor are we inclined to read the planes as fields of energy, as we do in *Points.* They are simply hard, flat surfaces that happen to be transparent.

It seems Gabo alone was unable to recognize this limitation in his work. As late as 1952, when his international reputation was firmly established, Gabo's entry into the English competition to construct a monument to an unknown political prisoner was turned down by the jury. While they felt the model worked moderately well, they said that ". . . on a monumental scale . . . it would register much less effectively, making us all too aware of its lack of pity and terror." Success eluded the artist in a similar proposal carried out in Rotterdam five years later—and for the same reason. Its large size notwithstanding (it is 85-foot tall), it never bridges the gap between its self-referential abstract idiom and the ideal of physical and spiritual regeneration it is intended to symbolize. Gabo's pursuit of monumental expression is part of the reason the exhibition at the Guggenheim ends on such a dull note. The last major project he executed—and the penultimate piece in the show—was a rotating brass fountain designed to shoot jets of water from its edges. In such a situation the suggested dynamism of Gabo's personal aesthetic is sacrificed to the superficial literalness of public display.

Gabo was always a small-scale sculptor, almost an intimist. His preparatory "sketches" are minuscule, never more than five inches in height and often smaller. They feel just right at that size, too. Even the sculptures worked up from them are not much bigger. Every photograph of Gabo at work—and the catalogue contains several—shows him at a table holding something small in his hand, looking more like an architect than a sculptor. All this suggests an ease with a mode of sculptural operation that is the antithesis of the heroic or monumental.

Looking at *Construction in Space with Balance on Two Points,* one finds it hard to imagine how Gabo could possibly equal it. He does, of course, although one has to traverse some pretty rough terrain to get there, through the stone carvings, for example, which strive for the dynamism and weightlessness of the plastic sculptures but which —needless to say—fail to achieve them.

By the Thirties, Gabo had come to feel that the planar language no longer communicated the spatial reality he sought. He began exploring ways of articulating his perception that space is curved. He did this first in a series entitled *Spheric Theme,* in which he cuts two plexiglass discs and joins them around an axial armature to create a single, spheric structure. Once again, these pieces articulate interior structure with almost no mass. They also dematerialize,

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irradiated by the light that is caught in the incisions along their surfaces. The *Translucent Version on Spheric Theme* owned by the Guggenheim is particularly fine, extending, in its absence of any vestige of solid matter, the weightlessness and immateriality of *Points.* It appears to be poised on the brink between the physical and the optical.

The *Linear Construction* series of the early Forties—one of Gabo's masterpieces—crosses that brink. In the variations that constitute *Linear Construction No. 1,* a square plexiglass armature is densely strung with a network of nylon monofilament in such a way as to leave a void at the center resembling a twisted almond. Its two ends are off-axis and point in opposite directions.

In this series, Gabo overturns the long-standing definition of sculpture as tangible form in space. For the almond opening at the center of these pieces is not a "void" in the traditional sense. The nylon monofilament constitutes mass reduced to the bare minimum. When it picks up the light, each thread glows, just as in earlier pieces the edges of the plexiglass planes glowed. Only here the accumulated fibers—which have a loose, in-between sort of form—dissolve into a haze of light and space. This transformation acts on the central opening, endowing it with an unexpected quiddity and turning it before our eyes into solid form moving through space. Gabo here seems almost to have created sculptural form out of nothing.

Needless to say, he doesn't actually do this; the effect is purely optical. But in *Linear Construction No. 1* he gives free rein to the strong pictorial element that has been present in his art from the beginning, when light and shadow first played across the *Constructed Heads.* The pictorialism now gives way to complete illusion. The focal element of the work, the almond shape, is completely un-sculptural; there is nothing to touch.

Just how important this element of unreality is to the success of Gabo's work becomes apparent when he moves to the variations in *Linear Construction No. 2.* In these, two plastic planes shaped like the near-void of the previous series interlock at right angles. Again, nylon monofilament is used, stretched between the interlocking planes to create gently curving surfaces. These sculptures either hang vertically or lie on their side, and they have all the luminescence of the constructions in the first series. The one lying on its side has a talismanic quality. We want to pick it up and hold it.

The *Linear Constructions* can survive this new graspability because, being translucent, they are able to maintain a balance between form and pure light. However, the story is very different in the work of the next twenty-five years. Wanting to see as many sculptures as possible installed in public locations, Gabo shifted from plastic and nylon to sheet metal and wire. Although the sculptural language remains the same, the new opaque materials drastically alter the character and feel of the work. In contrast to the vibrancy of most of the previous pieces, this sculpture is curiously inert and flat. At the Guggenheim this sensation was particularly acute, since almost half of the four alotted ramps were given over to displaying it. As one moved along them, one realized that Gabo's career as an innovative artist was long over, having ended with the second *Linear Construction* series, the apogee of his sculptural dialogue with space. For the change in materials effected a dramatic reshuffling of the aesthetic equation. Where sculptural line, expressed as edge or plane, had previously functioned as a carrier of energy, it now served as the outer limit of a static physical form. And whereas multiple nylon threads, aided by light, exerted a transfiguring effect upon the sculptural object, their wire counterparts served only to activate a stilled interior space.

Once this happens, Gabo's *oeuvre* comes full circle, and we find ourselves back where we were at the beginning with the *Constructed Heads*—in a realm where sculpture and space are separate entities. In the sculptures of Gabo's last twenty-five years, one feels the artist going to great lengths to infuse his work with the energy and vision of some of the earlier pieces. Alas, the flood tide of inventiveness has receded, leaving us to contemplate the empty shell of an idea.

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Poems *by Donald Justice & Dick Allen*

Psalm and lament

in memory of my mother (1897-1974)
Hialeah, Florida

The clocks are sorry, the clocks are very sad.
One stops; one goes on striking the wrong hours.

And the grass burns terribly in the sun;
The grass turns yellow secretly at the roots.

Now suddenly the yard chairs look empty, the sky looks empty,
The sky looks vast and empty.

Out on Red Road the traffic continues. Everything continues.
Nor does memory sleep. It goes on.

Out spring the butterflies of recollection,
And I think that for the first time I understand

The beautiful ordinary light of the patio
And even perhaps the dark rich earth of a heart.

The bedclothes, they say, had been pulled down.
I will not describe it. I do not want it described.

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No, but the sheets were drenched and twisted.
They were the very handkerchiefs of grief.

Now summer comes with its schoolboy trumpets and fountains,
But the years are gone. The years are finally over.

And there is only
This long desolation of flower-bordered sidewalks

That runs to the corner, turns, and goes on,
That disappears and goes on

Into the black oblivion of a neighborhood and a world
Without billboards or yesterdays.

Sometimes a sad moon comes out and waters the roof tiles.
But the years are gone. There are no more years.

—Donald Justice

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The bookshop

You enter in the evening, after walking down
Three steps to a miniature courtyard and a door tied open
With a piece of brown twine. The table lamps
Have tassled shades the color of scorched parchment,
Tiny pools of yellowed light beneath them,
So that looking across the room seems like looking
Across a small autumn garden. The proprietor,
Wire-rimmed glasses glinting, nods but doesn't lift his head
From his reading and the rye bread sandwich
Into which he's nibbled an almost total moon.
You browse, and while you do, your hands
Grow heavy and old, as if by taking close-packed books
From their shelves you are pulling bricks from a wall
Bound to collapse should you remove too many
And not replace them. What you're searching for, among
These histories, these poems, these illuminated guides
To the soul, or the soul's companions . . . these compendiums
Of fossils, stars, speeches, journeys when the world
Was a path through forest or waves against painted eyes
On the bow of a wooden ship plying the Aegean,
Is a single line of calm. This evening, you come close,
Closer than ever before, for it starts raining
Outside among the streetlights, and a tabby cat
Does figure eights around your ankles, the proprietor
Sighs deeply behind you. When you turn, he's brushing
Specks of pale white brie and crumbs of bread
Carefully from the pages of his open manuscript
Into crumpled wax paper. Without a word
He takes the book you hand him, toting its price and tax
On the smudged back of an envelope, his stubby pencil
Writing small numbers. You pay him what he asks

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And walk out into the rain, a black umbrella
Held high above you, the bookshop receding
Until it becomes a dab of flickering light
In the far reaches of Prague, or Budapest, or Rome,
Or what the eye sees when it looks down into
A heavily-varnished painting found behind the stacks
Of books in a closet: dark city at night unknown;
Artist unknown; the light almost there, almost gone;
Rain and leaves and shadows on the cobblestones.

—Dick Allen

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Art

American art between the wars

by William C. Agee

At a time when we are routinely bombarded by outsized exhibitions (brought to us at staggering cost), a show of sixty-two works, installed in two rooms, would seem so modest as to stand little chance of capturing our attention, let alone fulfilling what are widely perceived as the "needs" of today's museum-going audience. Yet "Order and Enigma: American Art Between the Two Wars," organized by Sarah Clark-Langager for the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in Utica, New York, sustained one's interest with a depth and intensity that larger and more costly enterprises often fail to do.

Our museums insist, for public consumption anyway, that the permanent collection is the heart of the museum, but few act as if they really believe it. Temporary exhibitions are generally given more attention and more funding, and in all too few museums is much time or space given to presenting the collection in a thoughtful manner. Almost never is there any correlation between the collection and the temporary exhibitions; each exists as a virtually autonomous entity, staffed by different curators, housed in separate departments altogether.

For a museum to function effectively, the collections and exhibition schedule ought properly to interact with some harmony, each drawing on, referring to, and illuminating the other. Enormous possibilities exist for temporary exhibitions focused on pertinent parts of permanent collections, but rarely are these possibilities examined in a serious fashion. (The Museum of Modern Art is a notable exception.) Works from the permanent collection can also enhance exhibitions temporarily on view, thus strengthening the link between a museum's exhibition program and its collection. In this manner, a museum can galvanize its collection, making it a real and active part of its program rather than a largely hidden and unknown body of work that drains the institution, often to little end.

"Order and Enigma" not only provided a model for such interaction but offered even further possibilities. Indeed, the very conception of the show fulfills an often stated but seldom realized goal of museums: namely, the sharing of resources in a common project. The exhibition consisted of paintings, sculptures, and works on paper selected entirely from the collections of six museums in upstate New York: the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute; the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, at Cornell University; the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse; the Albany Institute of History and Art; the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester; and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, where I saw the show. This was the fourth such collaborative effort by these museums (the first was in 1974). It was accompanied by an extensive catalogue with an important essay by Sarah Clark-Langager. At modest cost, then, the consortium contributed substantially to our

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understanding of a crucial and still little understood period of American art.[1]

A show of this size could not pretend to be comprehensive, but it was representative of the full range of American art between 1917 and 1941. Although certain key artists—such as Marsden Hartley and Milton Avery—were conspicuously absent, the works in the show by both major and less known figures gave us ample opportunity to appreciate the high achievements of this period and enabled us to focus on pertinent issues. One might also have wished for a large canvas by, say, Arshile Gorky, but his powerful, full-sized drawing, *Abstract Forms* (1931-32), afforded insight into another aspect of his art and certainly demonstrated the evolution of his formal language at a crucial stage of his development. At every turn, apparent gaps in the exhibition were balanced by rewarding, often unexpected inclusions. Fortunately, a seminal artist like Stuart Davis, whose art and theory touched on virtually every key issue of these years, played a prominent role in "Order and Enigma." Important paintings by Davis from 1917, 1931, and 1938 neatly bridged the period under review.

Sarah Clark-Langager's essay is a welcome addition to a slowly growing literature which will eventually define the myriad shifts and complexities within this difficult period. From the start, Clark-Langager insists that American art between the wars was not given to "native realism." Rather, the very nature of reality was brought under close scrutiny, as was the role—indeed, the very definition—of art. She goes beyond the basic dichotomy of rural vs. urban subject matter to view the period as one in which artists pursued varying definitions of what she terms the "ideal" landscape in America. She portrays artists as often united in their desire to capture the essence of America, but as ultimately divided over what the true America would look like. Davis and Charles Burchfield stood at opposite poles on the question of whether the modern urban landscape or scenes of small-town America could best represent the changing face of the country.

Clark-Langager presents a thesis in which the art of Charles Sheeler and Ralston Crawford, among others, embodied the objective order of modern America, which they depicted optimistically as a structured, harmonious world. The order of this new world was, however, greeted with ambivalence by others, as she points out. Joseph Stella, for example, while celebrating the architectural glories of the urban landscape, voiced his fears of the city as an "inferno" and "monstrous dream." And Edward Hopper, although he loved the geometry of the modern city, more than any other artist poignantly and even painfully evoked its pervasive melancholy, boredom, and solitude. For Clark-Langager, the ambivalence expressed by these artists constitutes one side of the "enigma" in the show's title. The private dreams of Surrealist-oriented art—represented by Gorky, Kay Sage, and Federico Castellón—constitutes the other.

In her section entitled "Art and the Voices of the Masses" Clark-Langager discusses the familiar artists who gravitated toward an art that would speak to broader segments of America. As might be expected, she includes Marsh, Cadmus, and Evergood, among others; but to her great credit she is quick to point out that here (as elsewhere) hard and fast boundaries cannot be drawn between groups of artists and their aspirations. She rightly notes, for example, that Stuart Davis's social and political concerns were as pronounced as those of any social realist. In this section of the show, one found unfamiliar paintings of surprising conviction that suggested the need for us to reconsider cer-

1 "Order and Enigma: American Art between the Two Wars" began at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in Utica, New York, in October of 1984. It was on view at the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo—the final stop on its tour—from January 17 to March 2, 1986. Sarah Clark-Langager, who organized the exhibition and wrote the catalogue essay, is Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute. The catalogue was published by the Institute (96 pages, $15).

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tain artists. This, of course, is an ongoing function of art history, one aided by the re-examination of museum collections. Joe Jones, for example, although a not unfamiliar name, certainly has not been ranked at the same level as other regionalists. Nevertheless, his strong and moving *Portrait of the Artist's Father* (1932) is a crisply painted, powerful psychological study that should prompt us to give him new consideration above and beyond his narrow classification as a regionalist. An exceptionally strong Pollock of the mid-Thirties, *Cotton Pickers,* showed just how accomplished and subtle his work of this time could be. Perhaps more than any picture that I know of, it demonstrates both his debt to and his struggle to free himself from the influence of Thomas Hart Benton. This agrarian scene is permeated with a romantic, faraway ambiance, recalling Albert Pinkham Ryder; at the same time it is witness to the nascent biomorphism in Pollock's work.

One of the rewards of "Order and Enigma" was the frequency of such revelations, which often provided insights into the nature of supposedly familiar works. In Susan Krane's installation in Buffalo, these revelations were heightened by startling juxtapositions. One of Dove's great paintings of the early Thirties, *Fields of Grain as Seen from Train,* reminded us, as did the Marin and the Demuths, of the fundamental contribution that members of the first generation of modernists continued to make throughout the Twenties and Thirties. The Dove was installed next to a Clyfford Still dated 1935, a startling and tonic contrast; although of different generations, the paintings are remarkable for a similarity in touch, texture, and organic shape. The Still was unknown to me, and for a moment I almost took it to be from Dove's hand, from about 1917. The juxtaposition is but one more suggestion that there was more continuity between early and later American modernism than we have yet recognized, an observation furthered by Sarah Clark-Langager when she notes that both Dove and Pollock were responding, each in his own way, to the rhythms of nature. Thematically, this continuity was also suggested by the gritty O'Keeffe of 1930, *Jawbone and Fungus,* which brought to mind the skeletal, prehistoric shapes we find in the sculptures of David Smith, Herbert Ferber, Theodore Roszak, and Seymour Lipton in the 1940s. Similarly, the machined forms in *Gallic Cock* (1939) by the sculptor Frances Kent Lamont, who is all but unknown today, forecast the imagery of predatory birds used by these sculptors. In turn, the mechanical, disklike neck of Lamont's sculpture seemed to have been inspired by similar shapes in the lower right corner of Gorky's drawing, a work perceptively analyzed in Clark-Langager's essay and installed close by the sculpture.

On the center wall in Buffalo, two superior Demuths, both of 1921, were hung next to the Stuart Davis paintings. This was another useful juxtaposition. It was in 1921 that Davis emerged as a full-blown Cubist painter, and in that evolution Demuth perhaps played a more decisive role than is generally known. Davis acknowledged his debt to Demuth, whom he had met in 1913 in Provincetown. "Order and Enigma" offered a rare opportunity to compare the work of the two artists. Other individual works—such as the loosely brushed Joseph Stella watercolor of 1920, *Skyscrapers*—gave us glimpses into less known aspects of familiar artists. Two sculptors as little known as Frances Kent Lamont—Warren Wheelock and Alice Morgan Wright—came as a surprise and were usefully contrasted to John Storrs, one of America's few truly accomplished sculptors of early modernism. Two paintings by Morris Kantor from the Twenties caused one to wonder once more why his art from this period has attracted so little attention. His emergence was a significant addition to American art, one more piece of evidence that refutes the easy and still pervasive assumption that America witnessed a wholesale retreat from modernism in the Twenties.

"Order and Enigma" included a small but strong representation of artists who created

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an order based on purely invented, nonobjective shapes in the spirit of Neo-Plasticism. Work by Bolotowsky and Biederman showed the variety of responses to nonobjectivity in America during the 1930s and was a fitting complement to an excellent discussion of the abstract art of this period in Clark-Langager's essay. The show and essay concluded with a superb Hofmann of 1940 (it is better to disregard one of the few ill-advised selections in the show, a Knaths of 1941) which pointed the way to the years when subjective content and private realms would take precedence over the factual and pragmatic world in American art.

And so this small, focused, and stimulating show unfolded, giving us virtually at every turn new and varied perceptions of individual artists, of artists in clusters and pairs, and of artists grouped with their peers or across generational lines—all as part of an infinitely complex history. No one would pretend that either the show or the catalogue answered all our questions. Nevertheless "Order and Enigma" opened a surprising number of doors through which we may choose to explore new vistas.

And there was more. In Buffalo, Susan Krane made inspired use of the Albright-Knox's collections with supplementary installations on either side of the exhibition. We were first given additional American-scene and representational pictures which reminded us just how highly varied in mood and style this vein of American art was. The most compelling grouping, however, was in the room devoted to post-1945 works by the American Abstract Artists group, including brilliant paintings by Josef Albers, Burgoyne Diller, A. E. Gallatin, and George L. K. Morris. This installation was in effect an extension of the exhibition itself, showing us how deep the geometric vein continued to run in American art after 1941. Once more, we had the opportunity to witness vividly the continuity of American art from 1930 to 1960.

Finally, near the exhibition galleries, one was able to marvel at what is surely one of the greatest rooms in all of America's museums, a room which provided a fitting climax to "Order and Enigma." Here one finds breathtaking masterpieces of postwar American art, all from the Albright-Knox collection: Gorky's *The Liver is the Cock's Comb,* Pollock's *Convergence,* and de Kooning's *Gotham News.* And these hang alongside first-rate works by Kline, Motherwell, Rothko, Francis, Gottlieb, Morris Louis, and David Smith. (We are also treated in these spaces to a crowning glory of early American modernism, Morgan Russell's *Synchromy in Orange: To Form* [1913-14].)

In the grace and comfort of the Albright-Knox's finely scaled architecture, the collection and the temporary exhibition flow together easily so that we sense ourselves as part of a single, almost seamless entity. It is an impeccable arrangement, providing an intellectual and visual experience seldom matched elsewhere. There will always remain the need for the large, temporary loan show, and, when used judiciously, there is no substitute for it. But rather than mount yet another pointless blockbuster exhibition, our museums would do well to emulate the upstate consortium. There is perhaps less publicity, less clamor, but in the long run the results may well be far more rewarding and substantial for both our museums and the audiences they profess to serve.

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Versions of pastoral

by Jed Perl

Dream of youth. Back in 1981, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh published an essay in *October* magazine called "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression; Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting." Buchloh's essay was about the way representation keeps returning in modern art, and he made an analogy between the representation of the World War I period and that of recent years, both of which he referred to (in a phrase from the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci) as "morbid symptoms." According to Buchloh, the return to (or continuation of) painted representation reflects "an undialectical fixation on utopian thought"; the artists become "ciphers of an enforced regression." Like many recent critiques of painting or representation said to be based on a socio-historical approach, Buchloh's essay sifts out to an exercise in taste, separating what he likes (abstract, impersonal) from what he doesn't like (representational, expressionist). The essay is a dud; but Buchloh has his finger on some issues about painting that could be interesting if dealt with in a more sympathetic, less lordly manner.

Representation and painting *are* values, and the quality of representational painting has much to do with the ways in which a painter makes representation feel valuable in a world where the mechanical is now the normal mode of representation. In recent years most defenses of painting have rather crudely taken up the case for Expressionism, offering aggressive imagery as a way for painting to reassert its power. Representational painting that's more temperate in its mood and less emphatic in its effects goes on, but no one makes an issue of it. When it comes to the works of the late Fairfield Porter (which were shown at Hirschl & Adler Modern last fall), or Gretna Campbell's paintings (which were at Ingber in February), or John Heliker's (at Kraushaar in April) no one has much to say: you like them or you don't. In relation to these painters—who happen to share a fascination with the landscape of coastal Maine—few would think to raise questions about the value of representation, or the ways in which the world can be represented.

The landscapes, still lifes, and figures that John Heliker showed at Kraushaar in April all deal with country life. Heliker draws us out of the city and into a world of old boat sheds, wild flowers, stormy skies, clam diggers, and ladies with big hats. In his own circumspect way, he's making a value judgment; his tacit rejection of the urban contains an element of escapism that's both seductive and disturbing. Heliker's brushstrokes, which are big and informal, seem to nuzzle up to the motifs. There's something warm and genial about the loosely worked manner in these paintings, but there's also an evasive, mysterious quality in the way those swatches of paint cover up as much as they reveal. The remoteness from ordinary contemporary life can make you nervous—

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can make you wonder just where Heliker means us to fit in. You don't know quite how to relate to these appealingly cozy views. The figures aren't ones we confront directly. Heliker's adolescent boys digging for clams and ladies working in their gardens are painted in a soft, almost smudged greenish-gray light that makes them appear elusive, conditional. They're not "us"—they're the "others." Painterliness—the washy, breathy flow of strokes—is meant to convey a sense of distance. The subject of these paintings isn't people or places but something more like nostalgia.

Nostalgia is quite a theme; you couldn't find a riskier one if you tried. It's impalpable—something that occurs in the viewer's mind, an indirect contemplation of the subject. When we're in a nostalgic mood we feel bathed in an aura, and obviously Heliker's brushstrokes and vibratos of pink-blue haze are meant to give us the sense of something that washes over us. When Heliker's paintings don't come off, it's because we don't feel that the haziness is a medium capable of revealing anything, or else we feel that what's revealed just doesn't justify all the sfumato. Some of the still lifes—though lovely in all their particulars—don't get deep enough into your psyche: you may find that this particular pair of binoculars or bouquet doesn't really echo in your mind. And when Heliker paints a healthy, Renoiresque woman, or a child with a woman, the painting can be very flat. We don't have any curiosity about who this woman is (we wonder if Heliker really cares): she seems a generic country type—and the elegant, floaty presentation gets to be pretentious.

Heliker's off-kilter, evocative technique is meant to keep the viewer in a state of suspension. The world is never quite in focus, and so when one of the paintings takes you to a special place you aren't sure how you got there, you just know you're there. (Does Heliker himself know why a particular picture works?) In recent years his best paintings—and they're the finest he's ever done—have had the almost automatist brevity of sketches. An example in the recent show was a study of two naked bathers—two blurred, pale, pink-fleshed young men sitting, knees up, on a green embankment. The painting flies up at you all at once—it's so informal, so telegraphically done, you can't make out any specifics. Arms, legs, heads are jotted in with a flick of the brush. *Two Bathers* is like a vision seen out of the corner of your eye from a moving train. It's an image of speed regarded from the serenity of the studio.

All Heliker's strongest paintings have this fleeting quality. He's an artist who's at his best when at his least typical—when the wild flowers and the white houses on the Maine coast give way to something elusively personal. Everything this seventy-seven-year-old painter does has a dreaminess about it, and he's most absorbing when the dream gets close to a classic old-man's dream—to a dream of youth. In a small self-portrait Heliker reveals himself as a droopy, faded man—a figure of gray dejection. The youngsters he likes to paint are the other side of the coin, a projection of the artist's youthful self—but idealized, washed over with a turpentiney mist. In Heliker's work of the past decade, it seems as if this dream of youth represents a private version of the pastoral. One feels the tug of a heaven-on-earth in the views of clam diggers—those adolescent boys who keep appearing at the edge of the shore, or by the side of a barn shelling their haul. When the boys are shown indoors, the Arcadian serenity is sometimes intensified, bottled up. In the occasional paintings Heliker does of young men in the studio (among which is perhaps his finest canvas, the *Young Printmakers* of 1982), the artist's private domain becomes the still center of this pastoral dream—an interior landscape where the boys can live on forever. There is (thinking of Buchloh's phrase from Gramsci) a touch of morbidity to this vision, for Heliker's adolescents seem to be held in a trance. His brushwork is self-absorbed and dangerously immobilizing, a contemplation of contemplation. Nostalgia is a difficult thing—a yearning, unsure of its goal.

In Heliker's recent show there's a painting of a solitary clam digger who stands

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beside some sort of shed under a lowering Maine sky. He's a country kid in a porkpie hat, but with an elegance about his relaxed stance and long, almost Mannerist-proportioned legs. He looks out at us with a face that's just a faint mask. At his neck there's a little bit of red scarf—a touch of vanity. The informality of this painting (the big strokes, the scraps of black drawing) make the kid seem miles away, held off from view. He's the artist's alter ego—a ghost boy in the summer fog.

Zip-a-dee-doo-dah. Richard Tobias's geometric abstractions, which were at Brooke Alexander in March, are painted in high-spirited, shocking-bright colors. Tobias understands the happiness of pure tints, and he knows the energy two adjacent colors can set off when they start to vibrate. Tobias's color orchestrations can get a bit predictable at times—some passages look like they come straight out of the Crayola box—but you always feel grateful for his ebullience and his sense of chromatic fun. We've been famished for color this season: every second artist is painting in some variation of mud-brown. Tobias provides a welcome ray of sunshine.

Tobias's show contained six easel-sized paintings—all but one were vertical and seventy-six by fifty-two inches—and a mural that wrapped around two walls and covered something in the neighborhood of 300 square feet. All his work is based on a grid idea: it looks like he begins by ruling off the canvas into squares. The paintings are about how these units burst into color and add up into rectangular shapes two or three units long and then turn corners to make a variety of L-shaped forms. Tobias's grid routine is repeated from canvas to canvas with a regularity that can feel computer-generated. It's a bit of a dull, obvious way to make a painting, but Tobias plays the raw emotional charge of color against the regular patterning of the surface with a syncopated, contrapuntal ingenuity that wins you over. This thirty-four-year-old artist seems to have invented his own Bauhaus design course, and in the gamesmanship of two-dimensional design he's caught a bit of the Utopian pleasure that lies at the heart of the Constructivist tradition.

The best of the easel-sized paintings are *Stage,* which is basically symmetrical, and *Offshoot,* where the symmetry is broken up a bit more. These two vertical paintings look like geometric rugs Anni Albers could have had her students do at the Bauhaus—some of the shapes and combinations of shapes might be straight from her treatise *On Weaving.* Tobias's centralized compositions are built of narrow vertical elements that recall Frank Lloyd Wright's early stained glass. The paintings are decorative constructions, and as in Persian carpets the central area is framed (on top and two sides) by a border of open, undivided space which sets off the activity within. The colors are twist-and-shout bright: there are stop-and-go reds and greens, sun-up yellows, and necco-wafer violets and oranges. The square and rectangular units of color are isolated by ribbons of black or white and these, in *Offshoot* at least, waver just a bit—you can feel the canvas breathe.

The mural-sized painting, called *Relay,* is made up of nine canvases put together to form an irregular shape. I doubt many people saw *Relay*—which was in a locked room at Brooke Alexander and was only available "upon request"—and this is a shame because it was the high point of Tobias's show. On the large mural scale the regularity of Tobias's procedure isn't any longer so annoying. The grid, which here wraps around two walls of the room, takes on the boldness of architecture, and you're led into a delightful labyrinth of decorative possibilities. The color in *Relay* is deeper, less brittle than in the easel paintings. I counted at least five different greens, and darks ranging from gray to blue to maroon. Tobias plays colors as if they were the timbres of the instruments in an orchestra: there's pleasure in the dissonance of a mauve against a green, or in the dialogue of two yellows that converse with each other from adjacent walls. *Relay* is a big, happy improvisation, and the informality of the appraoch is underscored by

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the charcoal lines that separate the various square, rectangular, and more complex forms. Though it's hard to say what *Relay* adds up to—it probably doesn't add up—it's full of bursts of high feeling and ingenuity. Several times I got up to leave and found myself sitting down again to take another look. All of Tobias's work is lean, yet friendly. He may be involved in an unnecessarily constricting type of pictorial structure, but his paintings leave you in an upbeat, zip-a-dee-doo-dah frame of mind.

From modernism to neo-classicism. Anthony Caro's recent welded steel sculptures are built like tanks. At first the pieces look ponderous, and this impression was heightened at the André Emmerich Gallery, where Caro's largest works didn't have enough room to breathe. They felt a trifle surreal, like giants forced to live in tiny spaces. One would like to see these architectonic structures—they recall the strangely-shaped eighteenth-century astronomical observatories in Jaipur, India—in larger rooms, or even outdoors. There was, though, something interesting about the too-intimate, nose-against-the-windowpane relationship one found oneself in at André Emmerich in March. There's a great deal of variety in the Caros, and the close perspective forces you to take them in piece by piece. One becomes hyper-conscious of the commingling of scrap and custom-made steel parts, of the range of thicknesses in the steel—from something like a third of an inch to something like an inch and a quarter. There are a great many different kinds of surfaces and edges. As you move around the pieces your eye is drawn up and down and sometimes through. These Constructivist sculptures obviously weigh a good deal, but the build-up of discrete elements—little steplike passages at the floor, halves of spheres that tilt up toward the ceiling—give a humanized, almost humorous edge.

Since Bernini set out to show how sculpture could compete with the effects of painting, much of the best sculpture has been pictorial—something one "sees" rather than

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"touches." The Constructivist tradition in sculpture is pictorial: Constructivist sculpture, as practiced by Picasso, Gonzalez, David Smith, and Caro, grows out of a desire to simulate the effects of Cubism in three dimensions—to bring Cubism into the real world. By now, Cubism has in this sense been living with us for going on three-quarters of a century. Already with Smith, and now surely with Caro, Constructivist sculpture finds itself in the condition of a traditional art—an art that looks back not only from sculpture to painting, but from its present to its past. Caro's work is in the elegiac mode. He's a kind of neo-classicist, reimagining a classic style (in his case, the style of Picasso's Constructivist sculpture). Caro sees the first thrusting moves of classic Constructivist sculpture through the pictorializing screen of memory. In the works at Emmerich the stripes of red or yellow or brown paint often seem intended to frame the action—to turn sculpture into a series of pictures. The shifts in scale in these pieces recall the internal proportions of the human form or the size-relations in still-life painting. The vistas—looking through an opening that pierces the heavy steel—are abstractions of perspective effects. In the gold-painted *Slow March* several red stripes frame a little view of arching forms—a souvenir of Matisse's Moroccan times.

André Emmerich has written a brief introduction to the catalogue of the Caro show in which he makes a distinction between "new art" and "novelty art." "All through the hundred year history of modern art," he says, "the sense of newness has been the touchstone of the best in art." What Emmerich calls "newness" others call "timelessness" and still others call "tradition." He's really talking about the imponderable element that gives vitality to art. Many of us are glad to go into a gallery like Emmerich that's committed to modernist ideals because even when we find much of what's shown there not to our taste, we can appreciate the connections that are being made between tradition and modernity. Caro has allied himself with the intuitive, anti-ideological purism that made Braque, Picasso, and Matisse the heroes of the School of Paris, and it's fascinating to see where this commitment leads. He's avoided kitsch, all right, but when we look at what's happening in his work we may begin to understand why so many of the moderns from time to time took the risk of kitsch or went back to the direct experience of the natural or manmade world. At Emmerich, modernism is becoming something the early modernists never wanted or expected it to be—a neo-classical style.

Hot pink. Looking back on the long procession of Robert De Niro's painting shows (I can only go back to Poindexter days, but others can take it further), we see an artist who's been living for decades in the same, slightly wacko world of ladies with dot eyes and endless snaky arms. De Niro—whose recent paintings were at Graham Modern in March—uses hip-guy colors like hot pink and electric blue to give a jocular twist to his loosely painted interiors and landscapes. It seems he's been outlining everything in the same thick curvy lines forever. This painter, who studied with Hofmann in the 1940s, has been playing the part of the wildman of the Matisse tradition for so long that by now he seems perfectly sane. His paintings look dashed off all at once—but he knows exactly what he's after. De Niro may splash around with the paint at times, but he's not a binger—his effects never feel out of control.

What De Niro can do makes most of the new Expressionists (and most of the abstract painters around, too) look pretty lame. De Niro's color effects are ripe to the point of bursting—but he holds them there. He understands how to manipulate shape and weight to give a color a particular emotional charge. When he floods a small canvas with hot pink and orange, as in *House on Elliott Creek, Buffalo,* he sends you floating. His areas of color are deep, tantalizing pools. There's always a carefully worked out relation between the density of a color and the shape and size of the canvas. The interactions of blue and yellow, of green and

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ivory are neatly calibrated. In a still life of a guitar reflected in a mirror, bright red and ochre-yellow shake hands: De Niro zeroes in on the exact vibrations of the hues.

When I'm at a De Niro show I'm glad to be there. But I never feel I must see the next show. The high points in one exhibit are top-flight but rather like the high points in the artist's last show. (And the big, multi-nude compositions he includes in almost every show have never gotten better.) De Niro always seems to know exactly what he's going to do; he always surprises us in the same way. He has taken from Hofmann and Matisse and Bonnard the idea of a Cythera —an enchanted isle—of pure color, and he conveys the heady joy he feels at being there. De Niro is happy just the way he is, sitting plumb in the center of the colorist tradition; but with De Niro—as with Caro—tradition has begun to look a bit bland. I'm a semi-fan of De Niro's work, and I'm not the only one. Astonish us!

Democratic vistas. This past winter, an exhibition of paintings by the mid-nineteenth century American painter John F. Kensett opened and closed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art without attracting very much attention.[1] The Kensett show, which was mounted in the temporary galleries at the back of the Metropolitan's American wing, was usually empty, and perhaps it's partly the fact that this beautiful show wasn't much on people's minds that's made it hard, month after month, to find an occasion to write about it. But June doesn't seem an

1 "John Frederick Kensett: An American Master" was on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art from October 29, 1985 to January 19, 1986. The show was organized by the Worcester Art Museum, where it opened early last year. The exhibition's catalogue (Norton, 200 pages, $24.95) includes essays by John K. Howat, Chairman of the Departments of American Art at the Metropolitan; John Driscoll, Guest Curator; Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque, Associate Curator of American Decorative Arts; and Dianne Dwyer, Associate Conservator at the Metropolitan.

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inappropriate time for Kensett after all, because so much of his art is concerned with the experiences of a Manhattanite (this was Kensett's city) who goes off in the summer to cooler, watery locales. Kensett, who became a pillar of New York art society and was instrumental in the founding of the Metropolitan Museum, is one of the great poets of the nineteenth-century pastoral—of the dream of Newport or Lake George or Nahant that his friend Edward Curtis described in a book called *Lotus Eating,* to which Kensett contributed some deft, lovely little landscape drawings.

Though Kensett, so far as I know, did no other illustrations in his maturity, he began his working life as an engraver, providing decorative vignettes for the American printing trade. His family had been in the business in Connecticut, and he began by working for an uncle, after which he was associated with firms in New York City and Albany. The work was painstaking and dull, and by the time Kensett, who'd been living in Europe for a number of years, saw his way clear to support himself with his painting, laying aside the engraver's tools was like giving up a ball and chain. Still, the engraver's discipline, with its emphasis on hard, clear lines and well-defined forms, stood Kensett in good stead all through his years as a painter. (He died in 1872, at the age of fifty-six, while attempting to rescue a drowning woman.) Kensett's landscapes are very much in the mid-nineteenth-century Romantic mode, but the clarity of his forms, which carry the traces of an earlier, more sober New England spirit, gives to the best Kensetts an unpompous gravity.

Like most of the best painting done in America in the mid-nineteenth century, Kensett's landscapes had little to do with current developments on the Continent. When from time to time in the 1860s or 1870s there are recollections of the French Barbizon school in one of Kensett's gravy-brown twilights or lurid, proto-Impressionist sunsets, the effect feels artificial, as if something artsy and fashionable were getting between Kensett and the American landscape. From the international point of view, Kensett's art exists in a kind of time warp—a time warp he shared with other American Luminists such as Martin Johnson Heade and Fitz Hugh Lane. The artistic bases for Kensett's pastoral vision were in place at the time he was born in 1816. And when Kensett got to Europe and saw and copied the Claude Lorrains, he had in hand all he needed in the way of precedents. (There's a touching passage in the fine catalogue of the show, where John K. Howat points out that Kensett lived for a time in "the Paris of Baudelaire, Delacroix, Ingres, and their argumentative partisans. Yet one may search Kensett's correspondence with the greatest care and not detect a whiff of smoke from the art theory battles between the Classicists and Romantics which preoccupied European artists.") Claude gave Kensett a way to order space by seeing nature in terms of a serene succession of foreground, middleground and deep distance. Kensett never, though, painted the full volumes and washes of light and dark we know from Claude's drawings and paintings; for Kensett nature was a bit bare and bonelike, with contours as nervous and one-dimensional as the rising and falling lines of a graph.

Kensett lacks the plushy softness of Claude; in Kensett's best paintings the atmosphere is on the surface—a thin skin—rather than lodged deep in space, as it is in all the great Claudes. One is grateful Kensett never abandoned the severity of the engraver's art; in his finest works he achieves a Romanticism that's almost Oriental in its simplicity. The novelist William Makepeace Thackeray, whom Kensett had known in Europe and saw in New York in the 1850s, was probably regretting the absence of Claudian amplitude when he commented that he preferred the English style—"a great buxom elm tree, a jolly green sward, a fair sonsy maiden"—to Kensett's "lean trees haggard landscapes and shrivelled matrons." Thackeray found Kensett's art to be "shaggy wan melancholy," and for us it's exactly this melancholy—which became less shaggy,

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perhaps less wan, in the paintings of the 1860s—that we love. There's a Zen-like asceticism in Kensett. In an excellent catalogue essay, Dianne Dwyer emphasizes the straightforwardness of Kensett's technique. There's no goopy build-up of surfaces here; Kensett isn't garrulous with paint. He lays in a scene with the minimum number of pencil lines he needs and then fills in the shapes in gentle washes of color. The paint often has a stippled delicacy.

Three paintings stay in one's mind in a special way: *October Day in the White Mountains,* a deep, horizontal russet and gold view of autumn valley and distant purplish hills; *View on the Hudson,* a misty lavender scene of river bank, tiny boats and distant shores; and *Lake George,* Kensett's famous brownish-gray, fog-bound, almost minimalist reminiscence of an empty lake through which moves one lone canoe. The impact of these canvases is surprising: they take hold of us with a poetic force not clearly based on pictorial invention. In the European landscape painting of these years we find many pictures with more original compositions and more surprising colors, yet something in the Kensetts grips us. Kensett makes of the literary-poetic side of landscape art an essence. The tiny figures in each of these paintings take their places in the natural world with a special, American decisiveness. Our hearts go out to the farmers returning home at the end of the *October Day in the White Mountains*; to the little woman and the dog sitting in contemplation on the river bank in *View on the Hudson*; and to the lone canoer in *Lake George.* On several occasions I left the Kensett show at the Metropolitan at dusk and walked west through Central Park, and each time I began to feel as if I were turning into one of those little figures. A figure who walks out into a world where the steady rhythm of the days and the seasons, and the seamless unity of earth, trees, and sky hold him in thrall.

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Theater

Who has seen Christina Rossetti?

by Mimi Kramer

I have been haunted by a ghost all winter long—the figure of a woman dressed in black. Her back is always to me; I never see her face. I know she is dead, though, and of another time by the trailing black gown she wears, high-buttoned with its whispering train. And from the veil and length of crepe that trim her wide-brimmed hat I know she is in mourning. She never speaks or beckons: I know her story from the pattern of her movements. Striding before me with long and grieving steps (the way ghosts will), she travels on a little way, then turns, lifts her arms in a despairing gesture—like one about to throw herself upon a grave—and vanishes into the air.

She first appeared to me one night late in November at around eight o'clock. Other people saw her, too. As she came drifting down the aisle of the Vineyard Theatre someone giggled nervously: was it to be a ghost story, then? But the phantom neither spoke nor beckoned. At the edge of the stage, she stopped and turned and seemed to raise her arms in that pathetic gesture of abandoned grief. A moment later she was gone.

Nor did she ever reappear. The play at the Vineyard Theatre wasn't, in fact, a ghost story—as anyone will see who buys a ticket to *Goblin Market* at Circle in the Square (Downtown). Based on Christina Rossetti's strange, balladlike poem about the "wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men" who lure unwary maidens to their death by offering them fruits whose luscious juices are "like honey to the throat / But poison in the blood," it tells the story of Laura, the more "curious" and headstrong of a pair of sisters, who dared to traffic with the goblins in the haunted glen. It tells of how she purchased a taste of their deadly fruit with a lock of her hair and of how, having done so (and doting on her purchase), she found herself unable, anymore, to hear the goblins' "fruit cry" up and down the glen. It tells how Laura, finding the goblins no longer audible or visible to her, but craving another taste of their fruit, began to dwindle, wither, and fade; and how, when she seemed at last to be dying, her timorous sister Lizzie "stood / In deadly peril to do her good," venturing out to traffic with the goblin men herself, in order to "win the fiery antidote."

Goblins, maidens, forbidden fruits, enchanted banquets, and mortal sacrifice: *Goblin Market* contains elements of just about every other popular narrative form—fairy-tale, folktale, moral tale, nursery rhyme—but no ghosts. Indeed, the Edward Gorey phantom who began the evening at the Vineyard Theatre turned out never to have existed. When she raised her arms in that unearthly gesture, for instance, it was only (after all) to push aside the gauze curtains that went round the stage. And though she vanished, it wasn't on the crowing of the cock. The ghost at the Vineyard Theatre disappeared by a simple process of theatrical transformation: mounting the stage, she

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took off the heavy hat and veil that had seemed so much a part of her, thereby becoming (what she must really have been all along) a handsome Victorian matron, rose-lipped and young and not an Edward Gorey figure at all.

At Circle in the Square there is no gauze curtain going round the stage; and the gauze curtain that lurks within the recesses of the auditorium's thrust stage hangs too far back from the audience for the opening seconds of *Goblin Market* to be as eerily effective as they were at the tiny theater on East Twenty-sixth Street. In all other respects, however, the profoundly wise and witty evening of musical theater that Peggy Harmon and Polly Pen have fashioned out of an obscure Victorian poem seems every bit as wonderful at the larger theater on Bleecker Street as it did at the Vineyard in November.

This in itself is an anomaly. It's rare for a production to manage the transfer to a larger venue (always a mark of success) without some loss or damage to the original, some alteration in the flavor of the thing. *Sunday in the Park with George,* for instance, was never quite the same after it ventured out from the safe confines of Playwrights Horizons: much of what had seemed intriguing or experimental in the intimate context of Theater Row seemed overblown and pretentious on Broadway. More recently, the Manhattan Theater Club's smash-hit production of Joe Orton's *Loot* suffered a similar fate: at the Music Box Theatre the play is only smile-funny where it was laugh-funny at City Center. *Loot* is still worth seeing, I think, partly because Zeljko Ivanek and Charles Keating (as Hal and McLeavy) give such beautifully funny performances and partly because Orton's is a brand of humor one ought to be familiar with. (It's interesting also to see how tame and rather sweet something regarded as scathing and subversive in 1965 has come to seem.) But the production as a whole (at least in the first days of its Broadway run) appeared to be suffering from a sort of theatrical jet lag: it hadn't adjusted to Broadway time, which is to say Broadway space. Everything in the Music Box Theatre seemed to be happening in slow motion.

By contrast, *Goblin Market* has, if anything, gained from its transfer. The performances of Terri Klausner and Ann Morrison as Laura and Lizzie, Ara Fitzgerald's choreography, André Ernotte's blocking and direction, and particularly Polly Pen's music: all seem to have expanded to fill the space the larger theater provides. To have seen *Goblin Market* at the Vineyard and to see it now on Bleecker Street is like seeing the original of a painting one has always been fond of in its instantiation on a postcard.

Goblin Market is an anomaly in a number of ways—beginning with the two young women who wrote and conceived it. By all accounts, they consider themselves primarily actresses. One, Peggy Harmon, is appearing in a Broadway musical (*Big River*); while the other, Polly Pen, who was seen last year in a little musical at Ensemble Studio Theater, understudied for Terri Klausner and Ann Morrison when *Goblin Market* was at the Vineyard Theatre, and I have it on pretty good authority that her own performance of the roles rivals theirs. The point is that the creators of *Goblin Market* have never, apparently, done anything like it before. Why, then, does one feel that Peggy Harmon and Polly Pen could take almost any work of literature, history, or philosophy and turn it into theater?

One simply longs to hurl texts their way. "Here!" one wants to cry, brandishing a copy of Henryson's *The Testament of Cresseid* or Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess,* "Do something with this one!" Theocritus, Kant, the Venerable Bede: there's an old Flanders and Swan joke about someone wanting to put together a musical based on Shaw's *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism.* And yet, why not? Who, after all, would have thought one could base a successful evening of musical theater on a 567-line narrative poem about female sexuality?

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Of course, there's been no shortage, recently, of musical theater based on "literary" texts: *Cats, Big River, The Mystery of Edwin Drood.* Someone even tried to turn Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* into a Broadway musical earlier this year. "Rat" was the juvenile lead, "Mole" the love-interest. The mysterious, indefinable terrors that Grahame's Wild Wood is said to hold for river-bankers turned out to be gang rape and a chorus of hip-grinding show girls. Conferring over some of the Toad's more exasperating personality traits, Rat and Mole fell in love. Toward the close of the first half, a female water rat showed up so the first act could end with a complication and the curtain fell on the Mole dejectedly belting out a song called "The Day You Came Into My Life."

The Wind in the Willows was a real shoulder-shaker. But some of these "literary" adaptations don't actually do too badly by their sources. One wouldn't wish a matinee ticket to *Cats* on T. S. Eliot, but it is possible to know something of Dickens or Mark Twain and attend a performance of *Edwin Drood* or *Big River* without taking offense. *Goblin Market* is a different kind of theater entirely, representing an entirely different approach to the notion of "adaptation."

Most musicals become musicals by means of a "book" that someone "writes," which usually means that someone sits down with a novel or poem and sorts out exactly how much of the original can be kept and what can be changed or distorted so as to better suit the exigencies of the musical-comedy form. Thus William Hauptman, facing the text of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* decided that the minor character of Mary Jane Wilkes could conceivably be transformed into a love-interest for the sake of a few good country-western songs. Similarly, Rupert Holmes, contemplating the numerous personages in Dickens's unfinished novel, judged that one character could be eliminated by turning Septimus Crisparkle and Mr. Grewgious into one person.

Anyone wishing to compare *Goblin Market* at Circle in the Square with the poem it is based on will be confronted by a conundrum: scarcely a word of Peggy Harmon and Polly Pen's script is altered from the original poem, yet almost nothing that one thinks or feels or experiences at the theater on Bleecker Street has anything to do with what Christina Rossetti actually wrote. What Peggy Harmon and Polly Pen have created is something that both is and isn't Christina Rossetti's work—like that ghost who is and isn't a ghost. The object seems to have been to see how, without changing the words, one could use Rossetti's poem to say more than it says itself. What they have produced takes on a poetic beauty of its own—poetic in the sense that discipline has been overcome by invention. The irony about *Goblin Market,* though, is that Rossetti herself would probably have hated it.

For who was Christina Rossetti? One of that crowd of languishing Victorian scribblers who hid from the world and life behind a curtain of malady and eccentricity. Like Emily Dickinson, her exact contemporary across the water, Rossetti emerged from a normal enough seeming girlhood and youth to devote herself to a semi-reclusive life of poetry and spirituality. Like Alice James, she occupied herself and those around her with imaginary ailments. They're not a very likable or attractive crew, those neurasthenic women writers—solemn Christina, coy Emily with her "Master" letters and her self-conscious verses, poor addled Alice with her megrims and her distaste for fertility and pregnancy—and yet they and others of their ilk seem to form a fellowship between them down the years.

Why did Virginia Woolf write so warmly of Rossetti in her reverential essay "I Am Christina Rossetti"? (The title is misleading.) Why do lines from Rossetti recur in *A Room of One's Own*? Why does Alice James in her diary quote from that most famous of Rossetti's "Songs":

> When I am dead, my dearest,
> Sing no sad songs for me;
> Plant thou no roses at my head,
> Nor shady cypress tree:

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Be the green grass above me
With showers and dewdrops wet:
And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget.

Why did Rossetti refuse two offers of marriage? Why does so much of her poetry and prose seem to cast an envious eye on the sister who entered a convent? Why did Sara Teasdale, who was to flee from Vachel Lindsay's ardor and die of an overdose of sleeping pills, travel to England to write Rossetti's biography? And why did Peggy Harmon and Polly Pen think of casting Terri Klausner as Laura, the doomed sister in *Goblin Market*?

For Terri Klausner is the image of Elizabeth Siddal—the woman in all those paintings by Gabriel Rossetti and Holman Hunt. And Lizzie Siddal is the first thing one remembers about the Rossettis—the woman who lived as Gabriel Rossetti's mistress for ten years before he married her and who wound up taking laudanum. The story goes that the grief-stricken painter-poet asked for a volume of verse to be buried with his wife which he later retrieved.

It is tempting though ahistorical to glimpse Christina Rossetti's sister-in-law behind the figure that Lizzie in *Goblin Market* holds up as an object lesson to Laura for why she should not loiter in the glen, "Jeanie"

Who should have been a bride;
But who for joys brides hope to have
Fell sick and died . . . .

But even if Lizzie Siddal was still alive when Christina Rossetti sat down to write *Goblin Market,* her image seems to hover around the margins of the poem. For *Goblin Market,* more than being about sex, offers a choice between two ways of life: that of "mindful" Lizzie, who fears and fights against whatever strangeness would seduce her, and that of "curious Laura," "sweet-tooth Laura," who yearns and tastes and lingers. Among these two, Rossetti's own preference was clear: when the road diverged, she took the path that was to be travelled by so many literary women. Lizzie is *Goblin Market*'s heroine and to that extent the poem can be seen as a justification for Rossetti's own chosen way of life. But that is not what Peggy Harmon and Polly Pen's musical is about. Their "adaptation" seems to be more about that ghost at the beginning of the evening and about how "sisterhood" can make Rossetti's way of life unnecessary.

The word "sisterhood" belongs, of course, to the vocabulary of feminism. I use it advisedly and with some apprehension. For if *Goblin Market* is not well known to the general public, it is far from obscure among literary feminists like Ellen Moers (who discussed the poem extensively in *Literary Women*) and like Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (whose hefty tome *The Madwoman in the Attic* has become the textbook on women writers and the nineteenth-century consciousness). Ellen Moers, perhaps the last of the sensible feminist critics, describes *Goblin Market* as "a poem about the erotic life of children." But Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar want to see it as both an act of submission to and a rebellion against a patriarchal society. For them *Goblin Market* is a feminist critique of *Paradise Lost* (since here it is men who are the tempters and who brandish forbidden fruits) and also a conventional tract perpetuating the man-made myths that sought to rob women of their rightful sexual heritage.

Now it's perfectly true that John Milton treated his daughters badly; true, too, that he reduced poor Eve to the comparative spiritual penury of having to worship God through Adam alone. But to see *Goblin Market* as a reworking of *Paradise Lost* (or a conscious attempt to avenge the ghosts of Milton's daughters) is to miss the fundamental point about what makes the poem unique. For the one bit of truth that Christina Rossetti hit upon here (however unwittingly) was the notion of taboos that are internally, not externally imposed, that have nothing to do with society or convention, but spring from certain mysterious fears and

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fantasies common to us all. In every tale of the pattern that *Goblin Market* follows, after all, there is always a caveat and a character fated not to take the warning. "Don't slaughter the cattle of the Sun," someone says; or "Don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden." But in tales of this sort there is also always an authority figure who states the rules: a Hermes or a Mrs. Rabbit. In *Goblin Market* there are no rules, no authority figures. There are no grown-ups at all—only goblins and maidens. That "twilight is not good for maidens" is just something you know.

The wisdom of *Goblin Market* chiefly resides in its lack of a moral context, just as its beauty and mystery lie in the way the world of the poem grows up around us as we read. There is no "Once upon a time . . . ." There is only: "Morning and evening/Maids heard the goblins cry . . ." and a catalogue of orchard fruits. The mistake that Professors Gilbert and Gubar seem to make is to literalize the poem, in describing it, and to place what happens in it within a moral context. They go so far as to characterize Laura as the "disobedient" sister. Peggy Harmon and Polly Pen were wiser than their academic sisters. They saw that in the world the poem creates there is nothing for Laura to disobey and that to literalize the context of the poem would be its downfall: there are no realistic sets or props in *Goblin Market.* There isn't even any realistic action.

But the two young women who adapted *Goblin Market* saw in it something else as well—something that would not have been visible to Rossetti herself, given the time and place in which she lived. Rossetti, writing in nineteenth-century England, thought she was writing about two separate people. It would never have occurred to her that Laura and Lizzie are one. Just as it would never have occurred to Rossetti (any more than to her feminist champions) that Laura and Lizzie's enemies lurk not in men but in each other. Feminism shares with Rossetti's Victorian mind-set a sentimental view of "sisterhood" that sees all women (like all

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men) as all the same: "Like two pigeons in one nest/Folded in each other's wings, .../ Like two blossoms on one stem . . . ." But Peggy Harmon and Polly Pen, with more insight into the human heart, seem to suggest that dissonance and counterpoint are at least as much a part of sisterhood as harmony. What they have done is to take a product of the Victorian psyche and graft onto it a modern sensibility. Joyce and Woolf were perhaps the first to take the fragmentation and conflict ubiquitous in the human mind as a literary subject in its own right. But the psychomachia is as old as theater itself. What happens onstage in the course of *Goblin Market* is that Laura and Lizzie become the embodiment of each other's fears—literally and metaphorically—while Rossetti herself is transformed from the author of the piece into one of the characters in the drama.

For the "book" of *Goblin Market* isn't the lines of poetry it uses but the metaphors it makes with theater. It is the shrouded nursery that two grown women come back to on the occasion of some unchronicled bereavement and the piles of dolls, toys, and books that they uncover. It is the music-box tune—made from the goblins' fruit cry—that one of the women begins to sing haltingly, as though inventing or remembering. It is the Pre-Raphaelite window shade, painted to look like the scene in Millais's *Ophelia,* that comes down to evoke memories of the haunted glen and the dollhouse with a top that swings back, out of which come huge pastel fruits for Laura's feast and a tattered lace tablecloth to represent an enchanted banquet. It is the infantile narcissism we see in Laura's ecstasy and Lizzie's virginal triumph over the goblins. The book of *Goblin Market* is the choreography and the lights and the music and the single onstage costume change that takes the sisters back to "Those pleasant days long gone/Of not-returning time" and turns them back into grown women with children of their own when the tale is done. Also, it is the Edward Gorey figure who begins the evening. For what is she, that melodramatic spirit of renunciation, loss, and addled loneliness if not in some sense an image of Rossetti herself?

Did they ever regret, those Emilys and Alices? This seems to me the one question with the power to make these unlikable women likable. Did they ever look back and wonder if they had done the right thing, devoting themselves to invalidism and eccentricity? Rossetti did, certainly—one sees that in her other work. Her verse and fiction are haunted by spectral sisters and by images of bushel baskets empty of fruit where others' are full. There are sisters who spy and tell and sisters who take the veil, sisters who marry or creep toward virginal spinsterhood. Finally, there is the sisterless heroine of Rossetti's short story, Maude, who chooses no path at all but sits around writing self-conscious, sentimental poetry for a while and then dies—as though to become neither wife nor nun was to become no one at all. Of course *Goblin Market* itself shows signs of conflict: for what Rossetti gives Lizzie is a chance to have it both ways, to traffic with goblin men and keep her virtue.

Which is, I suspect, what they all wanted: Emily Dickinson scribbling erotic letters to no one in her upstairs room, Alice James possessing her soul in silence by the still waters of Newport, Virginia, in her sexless marriage to Leonard, Sara Teasdale in hers to a boring businessman. What their fascination with Rossetti and what Rossetti's own voice suggest to me is that the feminists have got the wrong end of the stick entirely: the madwoman flees to the attic not in response to the demands of a patriarchal society but in order to escape conflicts within herself.

I can't help wondering, by the way, why Willa Cather used lines from *Goblin Market* as an epigraph to *The Troll Garden.* I'm thinking of having a copy of the book sent round to Polly Pen, though. Some of those stories cry out for adaptation and a little well-placed music might shed some light.

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Books

Chaplin disinterred

by Vernon Young

To the increasing number of corrective personal histories which has been a conspicuous feature of publishing in the last decade, David Robinson's *Chaplin: His Life and Art* is an imposing addition.[1] I can't offhand recall another biography of a performer that reconstructs the artist's life and professional achievement in such satisfying detail. In addition to the biographical text itself, there are appendices (of over a hundred pages) including the Chaplin genealogy, a chronological list of every play and film which Chaplin directed or in which he appeared, a selective example of his film shooting schedules and ratios, a Who's Who identifying everyone of any note mentioned in passing, three Keystone period scenarios, and a record of the FBI-versus-Chaplin activity.

My problem as a reviewer who feels that he should emphasize the essentials without crowding the view is that I haven't the faintest idea how informed on the Chaplin subject anyone is, outside those long-suffering film-society folk for whom there was a Golden Age of the Silents. I'll freely confess that although I have a proper respect for isolated moments of Chaplin's unarguable genius in pantomime, that respect is impatiently qualified by subjective associations with the dreary period of filmmaking in which I came of age. The period and the place. I remember vividly that the East End of London, seen through the slumming eyes of a West Ender in the Twenties had me wondering how much more depressing it must have been when Charles Chaplin grew up there at the turn of the century. Perhaps it was no worse. It's conceivable that Limehouse and its environs remained pretty much the same place for a hundred years and was visibly improved only after the Blitz of 1941 demanded its rebuilding. From our vantage point today, the setting of Chaplin's early years (he was born in 1889) will seem bleaker than it actually was if we overlook the fact that grinding poverty was a commonplace of English lower-class life as late as the Twenties and Thirties, when the international depression gave it another turn of the screw. To those who inhabited London at that level, however, centuries of accepted class suppression and the universal addiction to sentimentality which is best called Dickensian mitigated experiences we prefer to think of as wholly unbearable.

Chaplin's grandparents and great-grandparents, back to the eighteenth century, were in the service trades—publicans, butchers, bootmakers. A single gypsy among them was the only exotic ancestor besides Chaplin's father and mother, who were "music-hall artists," unstably mated and unevenly matched in the theater. Charles Senior was successful in a small way; Hannah Hill was not, she was too mercurial for steady survival. When in 1891 her husband left for an American tour their impending

1 *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, by David Robinson. McGraw-Hill, 792 pages, $24.95.

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breakup became an actuality. As a consequence of this, or perhaps before, Hannah had an affair with an actor named Leo Dryden, by whom she had a child. Dryden abandoned her shortly after, taking with him the then six-month-old child Wheeler. (Charles and Sydney, his half-brother from an earlier alliance, did not meet Wheeler until thirty years later.)

Unsupported by a husband and increasingly intimidated by audiences, Hannah reached the limit of her professional endurance. The loud abuse of drunken soldiers during a performance at Aldershot drove her from the stage. In desperation the manager pushed the five-year-old Charlie into her place. He sang a coster song, "'E Dunno Where 'E Are" and the audience, as if mindful of his dazzling future, showered him with coins. Hannah, deteriorating, took to sewing blouses for a living, at home, piecework at the sewing machine. Chaplin always insisted that despite her disabilities she had immense talent and that it was from watching her as she sat in the window and imitated people on the street that he acquired the art of pantomime.

At the age of seven and eleven, Charles and Sydney, owing to the absence of a father and the intermittent illness of their mother, were admitted to a workhouse for the destitute called Hanwell. (Note the habitual resemblance to the life of Charles Dickens.) We might suppose that Chaplin would never cease to deplore the humiliation of such an ordeal, yet by the standards of 1895, and in Chaplin's compensatory imagination, it was not entirely negative. (For one thing, this workhouse was in the countryside; it had undergone recent reforms of discipline and diet, and it had a swimming pool!) Years later, on his second return to England, he went to visit Hanwell, motivated by a spirit of nostalgia. In an astonishing letter to Thomas Burke (a noted authority on London), he expressed the fever pitch of his longing and his revisit.

> I wouldn't have missed it for all I possess . . . . God, you feel like the dead returning to earth. To smell the smell of the dining hall, and to remember that was where *you* sat, and that scratch on the pillar was made by *you*. Only it wasn't you. It was you in another life—your soul-mate—something you were and something you aren't now . . . . It's one of the skins you've shed, but it's still got your odour about it. O-o-oh it was wonderful. When I got there, I knew it was what I'd been wanting for years . . . . Being among those buildings and connecting with everything—with the misery and something that wasn't misery . . .

When Burke questioned his insistence on trying to recapture the past—the more so since the past couldn't have been edifying—Chaplin replied (in sentences that go far to explain, in his movies, the frequent combination of the winsome and the forlorn:

> But one can pick it up and look at it. One can think that one was happy once, or intensely miserable—perhaps it's the same thing as long as it's intense—and one can get something by looking at the setting . . . . And anyway, I like being morbid. It does me good. I thrive on it.

Early in the 1900s Hannah's window entertainments moved into the region of madness. In 1903, at age thirty-eight, she was committed to an asylum, and from then on she was in and out of her right mind at unexpected moments. (She died in Hollywood, twenty-five years later.) Charles Senior died, aged thirty-seven, from cirrhosis of the liver. *Our* Chaplin, confident of his place in the theater, registered with a theatrical agency. His first significant part was that of a newsboy in something called *Jim: A Romance of Cockayne.* The play itself was a streamer but one critic-journalist, while putting it down, gave high praise to the fourteen-year-old Charles, "a bright and vigorous child actor. I have never heard of the boy before but I hope to hear great things of him in the near future." (Among the many illustrations provided by Robinson, there's an expressive photo of Charles in this role.)

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In view of the persistent and ungrounded conception of Chaplin as Jewish it is incidentally amusing to learn that he tried, in 1907, to work up a solo act as a Jewish comedian; it was a complete disaster! About this time, turning his back on the "live" theater, he was engaged by Fred Karno, who produced, with considerable expertise, knockabout farces and pantomimes featuring elaborate sets and broadly satirical intentions. By report Chaplin was unimpressive in the speaking parts but notably effective as a mime. With one Karno company he came to America, twice between 1910 and 1912. The second tour was decisive. Explanations differ of his encounter with Mack Sennett in 1913. It was of course fateful; he was hired by Sennett to appear in the new art of the movies. Sennett himself Robinson describes as "a rough, tough, intelligent, uneducated man . . . with an instinctive feeling for physical comedy."

The essence of that comedy, as Sennett outlined it to Chaplin, was improvisation with a straitjacket. There was no scenario; they simply came up with an idea (i.e., a gimmick), then pursued the sequence that seemed to follow from it until it led to a chase. For a one-reel film between fifty and sixty shots were customary. "The ingenuity . . . lay in making with as little waste as possible, a collection of shots . . . to make a coherent narrative"—coherent and often as elemental as a comic strip. For example: Charlie falls asleep on a park bench and dreams he is a Piltdown caveman, flirting with the favorite in the king's harem; when the king finally overtakes him and strikes him with a rock, he wakes up on the bench, a policeman roughly shaking him.

A limited number of categories defined the film as either studio shot, location shot, or a combination of both. Robinson writes: "The quintessential Keystone set, which Chaplin himself was to use and elaborate during the next few years, consisted of a hallway with a room on either side. This arrangement would variously represent a domestic setting, with parlour (always to the left) and kitchen (to the right); a hotel, with rooms facing each other across the corridor, ideally placed for nocturnal mix-ups; neighbouring offices; or perhaps a doctor's or dentist's surgery . . . . Special settings might represent a restaurant, bar, hotel lobby, cinema or boxing booth . . . . Whatever the plan of the film, the director would restrict himself to no more than ten camera set-ups." (The moving camera was unknown and would remain so for another ten years.) Early, the director as such did not exist in these quickies. The photographer, or anyone in the film who was not involved otherwise at the moment, would supervise the shooting. What Sennett knew of film direction he had picked up when working for D. W. Griffith and from it he made this mindless formula. Mindless but not aimless. "The guiding principle was to keep things moving, to leave no pause for breath or critical reflection."

That's for sure and for that reason Walter Kerr's conception of Keystone seventy years later (in *The Silent Comedians*) seems accurate to me. "Normally it is possible to understand a joke that has faded, to recapture the principle that once provoked laughter while being unable to capture the laugh itself . . . . Not so with Sennett, for the most part. The jokes, as jokes, are rarely there . . . and all the activity is so headlong that there is scarcely time to pause for the 'constructed' quality of a jest." These films may be, as he says, "successful agitations," exploring "elaborate visual possibilities"; to my sense they are at the same time juvenile and sadomasochistic.

For their time they served. And there was one significant aspect of their milieu which is perhaps not appreciated by the present-day filmgoer. However generic their particular settings were intended to be, they were somehow indubitably California. When I arrived here in my teens I was bitterly disappointed that the land- and cityscape of the northeastern United States bore no resemblance to the sunlit boulevards with palm trees which I had glimpsed in the Chaplin comedies and had construed as America all over!

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Chaplin's first film part was in *Making A Living,* released in February of 1914. He played an unscrupulous dude (he was billed as Slicker), wearing a top hat, a check waistcoat, stiff collar, a spotted cravat, and a monocle. It sounds like a parody of the gentility he would ape later on with a more refined treatment. Chaplin hated the film, because he had small respect for its nominal director, Henry Lehrman. According to Robinson, Walter Kerr has perceptively pointed out that Chaplin was nonetheless authoritative, for in this part he initiated "a permanent and productive pattern of [his] screen personality, of *'adjusting the rest of the universe to his merely reflexive needs* [italics added].'" Robinson recapitulates, "The Dude is explaining his own merits to the newspaper editor, emphasizing his argument by banging him on the knee. When the editor withdraws his knee, the Dude pulls it back again so that he can continue his pummelling."

Robinson lists thirty-five Keystone films for 1914 in which Chaplin appeared. With the eleventh, *Twenty Minutes of Love,* he appears on the credits for the first time as Director/Scenario, as well as actor. He had introduced the now familiar Tramp, with costume, in the second film he made that year. In 1984, according to Robinson, a witness to the event still survived: Hans Koenekamp, the cameraman who filmed it. "Can't think of the title. Tried to remember it. I can still see the scene he's in, though. It was a hotel lobby, and he acted like a half drunk with that cockiness with his foot and the hat and the cane. I shot him." The title he couldn't remember was *Mabel's Strange Predicament.* Not strange at all, the predicament was standard in the Keystone repertory: bedroom mix-ups in a small hotel. But Sennett himself was impressed by Chaplin in the lobby scene and ordered the cameraman to get a longer take than they normally permitted.

To what extent Chaplin's influence "subtilized" the Keystone comedy, as has often been said, can only be asserted by someone more willing than I to study at least a half hundred such films. Robinson seems to have viewed most of them, and I think we can take his word for it that Chaplin's whole conception of comic narration was superior to that of Sennett or of anyone in his vicinity. As Robinson nicely puts it: "Keystone comedy was created from without; anecdote and situations were *explained* in pantomime and gesture. Chaplin's comedy was created from within . . . . The crucial point of Chaplin's comedy was not the comic occurrence itself, but Charlie's relationship and attitude to it. In the Keystone style, it was enough to bump into a tree to be funny. When Chaplin bumped into a tree, however, it was not the collision that was funny, but the fact that he raised his hat to the tree in a reflex gesture of apology."

What lends pathos to the Chaplin persona in these emergent years of his fame was, I think, his peculiar interlacing of self-mockery and sober aspiration. I remember vividly (though I can't place the film it was in) a vignette wherein the Tramp sits alone and eats a hard-boiled egg. With exquisite timing, and as if absentmindedly, he flavors the egg with a pinch of salt from one waistcoat pocket and a pinch of pepper from another. A toff, *malgré lui.* In the same category, of course, is his boot-eating ceremony in *The Gold Rush,* when he gnaws mincingly on a nail as if nibbling the meat from a bone. These are his basics: aspiration with a shrug and an untiring capacity for transforming everything he touches into a semblance of something else. *The Pawnshop* of 1916 was a concentrate of his flair for metamorphosis. Robinson has reminded me of that triumphant sequence in which Chaplin examines an ailing alarm clock brought back by a customer.

> Charlie becomes a doctor and the clock his patient as he sounds it with a stethoscope and tests its reflexes. Suddenly it is a rare piece of porcelain as he deftly rings it with his fingertips. He drills it like a safe. He opens it up with a can-opener and then dubiously smells the contents with a look that declares them putrid. Momentarily the clock becomes a clock again as Charlie unscrews the mouthpiece of the tele-

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> phone and transforms *that* into a jeweller's eye-glass. Having oiled the springs, he produces a pair of forceps and becomes a dentist as he ferociously pulls out the contents.

And so forth. When, in 1972, Chaplin was finally given official recognition with a special Oscar, the wording of that presentation was unusually accurate, coming from Hollywood. He received the award for his "incalculable effect in making motion pictures the art form of the century." *Incalculable* is just right. The reader may need to be reminded that before Chaplin ever made his renowned early masterpieces (*The Immigrant, The Pilgrim, Shoulder Arms, The Kid*), the entire vocabulary of moviemaking (*except* the travelling camera) had already been invented. The techniques of film production were available for anyone to amplify. Charlie's art was inimitable and his directorial techniques restricted. Since his principal contribution to the medium was himself—that is to say, the Tramp and his exclusive transactions with the world—to keep that personality focused he was in fact obliged to *limit* his scope in order to maintain the coherence of his vision. To assert that the poetry of the medium is more important than its narrative craftsmanship would be gratuitous; poetry in the performing arts can't be expressed without the craft, but *range* is not everywhere necessary. To make my meaning clearer: When we compare the comedies of Chaplin with those of Buster Keaton, Keaton will prove to have the greater latitude of witness point. If, in Keaton's films, there is nothing to rival the dream sequence in *The Kid,* there is no episode in a Chaplin film comparable to that fabulous setup in *The Navigator* where Buster and his girl, lone passengers on an ocean liner adrift, keep missing one another in a *tour de force* of timing and camera perspective which, seen today, justifies our exclaiming: *Kafka*!

On the disparate space requirements of Chaplin and Keaton, Gilberto Perez has perhaps written the last illuminating word in his essay on Keaton, "The Bewildered Equilibrist," which appeared in *The Hudson Review* in 1981.

> It would be an exaggeration to say that Chaplin needs no space outside of himself to realize his character: something like a bare stage would not do for the Tramp, who exists in relation to a milieu which Chaplin's sets pithily evoke. In Chaplin's circumscribed space, however, the setting becomes strictly subordinate to the character, and that little fellow scraping through on the outskirts of society assumes on the screen his rightful place at the center of things . . . in a space closed off from the world . . . . Unlike the Tramp, Keaton's character wants a place in the world, not just in our hearts, and not a special place, but one like everybody else's, so Buster accordingly inhabits a space which seems as large as the world and in which he enjoys no primacy over his surroundings.

I part company, critically, with Mr. Robinson (and many others) when he addresses himself to the later films of Chaplin and finds them only slightly inferior to those made before the mid-Thirties. *The Great Dictator* (1940)—excepting the dance with the globe, Chaplin's pseudo-Hitler gibberish, and his shaving of Conklin to the rhythm of the Hungarian Rhapsody—is hopelessly unfunny. Robinson's account of the script partially explains why: it was Chaplin's first dialogue scenario and was almost three hundred pages long (the average feature script seldom exceeds a hundred pages). Heretofore Chaplin had not worked with an overall shooting plan; he depended, reliably most of the time, on improvisation. Increasingly he was now indulging his tendency to be didactic, especially when advancing his à-la-carte Liberalism. This is crushingly evident, I should think, in that concluding sermon, six minutes running time.

Given the premise—that a Jewish barber is mistaken for the dictator and is given an opportunity to address the world—there was only one possible conclusion: the film should have ended before he spoke one word. I am amazed that Robinson believes

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today that "the utopian idealism and unashamed emotionalism" of that speech is still relevant. Relevant to what? Not to art, and that is what we are evaluating. Some years later, Chaplin confessed, "Had I known of the actual horrors of the German concentration camps, I could not have made fun of the homicidal insanity of the Nazis." Making fun he did not succeed in doing but his admission reveals a perplexing lack of imagination. Since 1933, most of us had had no illusions that Hitler was merely comical; by 1938, when Chaplin conceived this film, Munich had come and gone and we knew that the worst was only being postponed.

I feel no obligation in this review to detail my disagreement with Robinson's temperate views of *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) and *Limelight* (1952). Let me say just this: when Chaplin gave up the Tramp he abandoned the region in which he most fully expressed his art—the region of the equivocal. And when he tried too hard to elicit emotions from us which he had often elicited with no effort he lost much of his authenticity. The reader may find diverting an opinion from Picasso, who was otherwise an admirer (the occasion was *Limelight*). "When he starts reaching for the heartstrings, maybe he impressed Chagall, but it doesn't go down with me. It's just bad literature." (The Hollywood Foreign Press Association gave a scroll of merit to *Limelight* in 1952, chiefly because they saw Chaplin as the object of persecution by the U.S. government.)

The Countess of Hong Kong (1967) I have not seen and I've never read a review that persuaded me I should have. Like *The King of New York* (1957), it was made in England during Chaplin's exile. The latter movie is a revenge product and the source of it we need to recall with a shudder: the nightmare of vilification and prosecution which began in 1943, when Joan Barry, a movie-struck neurotic from Brooklyn, who as female and as potential actress had temporarily impressed Chaplin, filed a paternity suit against him. In October of that year, Joan Barry's child was born and in February of 1944 Chaplin was indicted by a federal grand jury

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for having violated the Mann Act, which made it illegal to transport a woman across state lines for immoral purposes. He was acquitted of this charge by unanimous vote. But a new trial was demanded by Barry on the paternity issue, which Chaplin was confident he would win because blood tests would declare his innocence. But the jury could not agree—even though the blood tests were indeed negative—and since Chaplin wanted complete exoneration a re-trial was ordered for April of 1945, at which time, goaded by the defamatory prosecution of Joseph C. Scott, the jury (of eleven women and one man) brought in an 11-1 verdict against Chaplin.

By this time, Chaplin was being hounded as much for his political views as for his personal libertinism. Previous to the Barry episode, he had spoken at rallies for Russian War Relief and in support of a Second Front. As he had never become an American citizen—and had freely and often, notably in press conferences, spoken his piece about the evils of capitalism and about how the Russian Communists had saved our lives in 1941—Chaplin was an upfront target for the House Un-American Activities Committee, which had actually been investigating him since 1939.

Unable to expose Chaplin as a member of the Communist Party, officialdom permitted him to sail on the Queen Elizabeth, in 1952, with a re-entry permit. After he had been at sea for two days, he received the news (via the ship's radio) that his permit had been rescinded by the United States Attorney General, who ordered the Immigration and Naturalization Service to hold him if he attempted to re-enter the country. One can imagine the bitterness of his feelings. Even so, silence would have been preferable to *The King of New York,* a film so wildly and spitefully bad that I thought it not worth reviewing at the time. All I can remember, with help from Robinson's somewhat vague synopsis, is that it concerned an exiled king, hoping to find a brave new world in the United States and finding instead paranoid political committees and advertising hokum. To augment his diminishing royal funds, the king is obliged to appear in television commercials. Whatever satire his subject seemed to justify, Chaplin resorted to the obvious, even to a slapstick sequence involving a fire hose—altogether retrogressive. (We learn from Robinson, by the way, that Joan Barry, after two more children and a divorce, wound up in a mental hospital.)

Unlike his most memorable creation, Chaplin did not vanish, lonely and unencumbered, toward a nebulous horizon. There is no pathos in the terminal years of his exile. After leaving America he lived happily ever after, with a Swiss bank account and a loving wife, Oona O'Neill, with whom he had eight children.[2] In 1971, America (i.e., the Hollywood Motion Picture Academy in cooperation with the Lincoln Center Film Society) was prepared to make amends for the indignities previously heaped upon Chaplin. He returned, briefly, in April of 1972 and whatever reserve he had intended to muster was dispelled by the fashionable and laudatory champagne reception he was given in Manhattan. An actor's favorite music is first and last applause. A week later he received in Hollywood that special Oscar I mentioned above for his "incalculable effect" on the movie as art. Reports of this ceremony reveal him in a seemingly trustful mood, inordinately grateful and overeager to please. But distance sometimes vitiates enchantment. Among the second thoughts he published in *My Life in Pictures* (1974) he confessed: "I was touched by the gesture but there was a certain irony about it somehow." So there was in his investiture as Sir Charles Chaplin in 1975.

2 His daughter Geraldine, though not the only one connected with theater, is probably the only one known to the public. Her most impressive roles have been in the Spanish films of Carlos Saura. Chaplin had three other children, of whom one, by Mildred Harris, did not survive its first year; of the two others, by Lita Grey, Charles Spencer Jr. died in 1968, age forty-three.

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Art does not invariably haunt or embellish the death of artists but in Chaplin's case art, close to kitsch, did so. With a final Dickensian touch, he contrived to die on Christmas Day, 1977. And two months later (less reminiscent of Dickens than of *Grand Guignol*) his body was stolen from the Vevey cemetery by culprits described by Robinson as "a pathetic pair of Keystone incompetents." They were automobile mechanics, one Polish, the other a Bulgarian defector. Inspired by a similar theft (in Italy, of an industrialist), they hoped to raise enough hostage money (600,000 Swiss francs) to set themselves up in a garage. Their amateur handling of the body-snatching operation resulted instead in their swift apprehension. "The coffin was found buried in a cornfield . . . on the eastern end of Lake Geneva . . . where Wardas [the Pole] was accustomed to go fishing. Oona was touched that they had chosen so peaceful a spot for Chaplin to rest in." Wardas was sentenced to four and a half years' imprisonment; Ganev, the Bulgarian, received a suspended sentence of eighteen months for "disturbing the peace of the dead and attempted extortion." On the land in which they had buried Charlie, the farmer who owned that piece of it "erected a simple wooden cross, ornamented with a cane, in memory."

Lukács before Marx

Lee Congdon The Young Lukács. University of North Carolina Press, 235 pages, $21
Mary Gluck Georg Lukács and His Generation 1900-1918. Harvard University Press, 265 pages, $25

reviewed by René Wellek

Georg Lukács (1885-1971) is the one Eastern European critic and philosopher who still commands an audience in the West. In the East, where he must have had a great effect on the formulation of Marxist aesthetics and the concept of realism, he has been relegated into the past as a "revisionist." Only in Hungary is there a devoted circle of followers still flourishing. His influence in Germany and Italy was and is enormous. In Germany, there is a collected edition of his writings which, still incomplete, runs to twelve stout volumes, and a large, often polemical literature on about every aspect of his wide-ranging work. Theodor Adorno, the most prominent member of the Frankfurt School, although he attacked Lukács strongly, spoke of the "halo" which surrounds his name, due to the writings of his youth: *The Soul and the Forms* (1911), *The Theory of the Novel* (1916), and *History and Class Consciousness* (1923). In Italy the interest is about as great. The echo in France has been weaker, but the sociologist Lucien Goldmann is an avowed disciple and the philosopher Merleau-Ponty has written on him.

Lukács's reception in the English-speaking world came later. Apparently, *Essays on Realism,* introduced in the English edition by Roy Pascal and in the American by Alfred Kazin in 1950, was the first book of his to appear in English. Much has been translated since, but his main work, the two-volume *Aesthetik,* still goes begging. In recent years, Marxists and other sympathetic commentators have taken up Lukács's cause, largely preoccupied with the work of his later, Marxist years.

It is something of a relief to read the two new books under review here, which discuss Lukács before his conversion to Communism in 1918. Actually, Lee Congdon's *The Young Lukács* takes the story further, to Lukács's part in the short-lived Soviet Republic of Hungary of 1919 and his exile in Vienna. It ends with a brief reference to Naphta in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain,* a figure who is supposedly modeled on Lukács (although Mann, who met Lukács only once, strenuously denied this). Mary Gluck's book starts by describing the so-called Sunday Circle—including Lukács, the film theorist Béla Balázs, the sociologist Karl Mannheim, and others—which constituted itself in Budapest in the autumn of 1915. It ends with the dissolution of the

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Circle in the first year of Lukács's exile in Vienna.

A common strength of both books is their attention to Lukács's early Hungarian environment: his friendships, his relations with women, his ultimately frustrated academic career in Budapest and Heidelberg, his interests in the theater, his participation in intellectual circles and lecture organizations, and his early journalism. Both authors have the advantage of knowing Hungarian, and so are able to cite and quote from letters and documents accessible only in Hungarian. Both have profited from the discovery, after Lukács's death, of a trunk that contained correspondence and notes he had deposited in a Heidelberg bank in November of 1917 and forgotten.

The image of Hungarian intellectual life in the first decades of this century is most impressive as it emerges from these books. One also understands something of Lukács's emotional struggles and conflicts, and of his background. Mary Gluck gives an account of his violent rejection of materialism as well as aestheticism and his turn toward philosophical idealism. (This, in turn, was tinged by a deep pessimism about the course of history.) The interest he took at the time in fairy-tales, dreams, and folk legends—and in Martin Buber's Hasidic stories—is somewhat surprising.

As Mary Gluck explains, almost all Lukács's friends came from the Jewish middle class. They were isolated, "marginalized," in her sociological lingo. She goes back to the history of the Lukács family—the original name was Löwinger, which was Magyarized to Lukács—and to Georg's revolt against his parents. Mary Gluck tells of Lukács's painful relationship with Irma Seidler, whom he spurned because he believed happiness would paralyze his creativity. She married a painter and when the marriage failed committed suicide, an event which left Lukács with deep feelings of guilt. His next attachment was to a Russian woman, Ljena Grabenko, a revolutionary and, reportedly, a former terrorist. They married in 1914, but it did not turn out well. She lived with another man and eventually disappeared into Russia. Lukács finally returned to an acquaintance of his youth, Gertrud Bortstieber, whom he married in Vienna in 1920. They lived together in harmony until her death in 1963.

Most of Mary Gluck's book is taken up by a well-informed account of the political and social situation in Hungary during this time, the cultural milieu (which to Lukács seemed backward and provincial), and the conflict between the liberal older generation and a younger one leaning toward socialism or anarchy or simply a retreat from politics altogether. Thanks to his father's money, Lukács was able to study in Berlin and Heidelberg, where he established cordial relations with the sociologist Georg Simmel and the economist Max Weber. He also became a close friend of the young philosopher Emil Lask, a Jew from Galicia who volunteered for the German army in 1914 and was killed in battle in 1915. Lukács tried to get a foothold in the German academic world; he wrote two versions of a treatise on aesthetics in 1911-12 and in 1913-14. (He commented later that he could have become "an interesting, rather eccentric professor in Heidelberg.") But before the treatise on aesthetics, Lukács wrote much literary criticism in Hungarian. *The History of the Evolution of Modern Drama* (1911), in two volumes, is partly a sociological, partly a literary history of modern drama, mostly German, starting with Ibsen and Strindberg. It is sharply polemical against naturalism and places great hope in a new classicism, which Lukács saw (and welcomed) in the plays of Paul Ernst. Lukács collected his other essays in Hungarian in *The Soul and the Forms,* which appeared a year later in a German translation that had been done by friends with Lukács's supervision and rewritings. These essays established his German reputation. They discuss German topics: Novalis, the most spiritual German Romantic; Theodor Storm, as a type of German burgher; Stefan George, as a lonely poet; and finally again Paul Ernst, in an ambitious essay on the "Metaphysics of Tragedy." To Lukács,

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tragedy is the longing for selfhood which can be fulfilled only in death, a concept which has been seen as an anticipation of existentialism. Ernst's ambitions in his plays, which seem today lifeless and contrived, was to find a synthesis of Sophocles and Shakespeare, a newly revised classical tragedy. Another essay interprets the strange relationship of Søren Kierkegaard to Regine Olsen. Lukács saw this relationship implicitly as a parallel to his own tragic liaison with Irma Seidler, to whose memory the book is dedicated. The first essay is a defense of a hybrid of art and knowledge—of intellectual poems—all in the name of "life," a word repeated twenty times on a single page. Lukács in later years considered the essays in this volume to be "extraordinarily mannered." Eventually, he overcame the obscurities, the metaphorical fancies, and involved argumentation of this early book. Still, even *The Theory of the Novel* shows traces of his early aestheticism. The very first sentences, glowingly exalting ancient Greece, remind us of Winckelmann's essay on classicism, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (1755); but the book is actually Hegelian in method. It seems inspired by Schiller's distinction between naïve and sentimental poetry. Lukács sketches in broad strokes the contrast between the Homeric epic and the modern middle-class novel, which he sees as the new expression of the alienation of man, of a world abandoned by God in a "state of complete sinfulness." *The Theory of the Novel* was first published in a periodical in 1916; it came out in book form only after the war. Nothing says expressly that it was planned as the first part of a book on Dostoevsky, but it could be seen this way. Lukács actually prophesied the end of the novel and recognized the possibility of the novel's return to an epic only in Tolstoy. Dostoevsky, he says on the last page, did not write novels; rather he wrote about utopia, which, as we can judge from the notes recently found, Lukács saw as the end of the alienation of man—of the dichotomy of subject and object—a new heaven on earth. Knowing full well of Dostoevsky's czarist ideology, Lukács located this utopia in the promise of Soviet Russian Communism.

Lukács's conversion to Communism was a sudden decision. In an article, "Bolshevism as a Moral Problem" (1918), he still doubted that good (i.e., the classless society) could issue from evil, dictatorship, and terror. But a few weeks later, in December of 1918, he joined the Party, which had been organized only since November 24. One cannot understand the decision outside its immediate historical context. The monarchy had collapsed in the last days of October 1918, and Michael Károlyi, a liberal count, had become premier. He cherished the illusion that Hungary could preserve its territorial integrity. In 1919, a wave of Hungarian nationalism forced Károlyi to reject the allied ultimatum to cede territory. Soon after, he resigned, making way for the soviet republic and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat under Béla Kun. Lukács became deputy commissar of public education. There is a lot of controversy about his behavior in this position. He has been accused of serious crimes; he himself acknowledged only that he ordered the shooting of some deserters. Certainly he introduced drastic reforms. He purged the university (dismissing half of the professorship), nationalized the theaters of Budapest and opened them to the working classes, suppressed all bourgeois papers and journals, discontinued religious education, and so on. But the whole Republic lasted only 133 days. When it collapsed, Lukács had to flee to Vienna. When extradition to Hungary was refused by the Austrian government—partly because of an appeal on his behalf signed by Thomas Mann, among others—Lukács stayed in Vienna and wrote for exile journals. (His superior at the Ministry of Education, Otto Korvin, was hanged by the new Horthy government.) The years in Vienna (1919-1929) produced Lukács's most influential political book, *History and Class Consciousness* but no literary criticism.

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The story is told by both Congdon and Mary Gluck, more or less agreeing on all important issues. Mary Gluck's emphasis is on the Hungarian cultural milieu; Congdon's on intellectual development. Both try to be objective and keep any personal judgment almost entirely out of their accounts. Mary Gluck says hardly anything critical of Lukács and only expresses puzzlement at the "impenetrably esoteric" Heidelberg aesthetics. Congdon is more outspoken, but completely misstates the emphasis of his own book when he says "the search for a female companion constitutes the major theme of [his] study." Actually he makes an effort to expound the theories of Lukács's early books and lectures and gives some sense of the historical setting of the conversion, but he seems to accept too quickly a "solution of the final riddle of Lukács' conversion to communism." He sees it in Lukács's accepting Kierkegaard's "either/or" as the necessary choice—between the aesthetic and ethical life. But the choice, however theoretically justified, was certainly determined by the momentary political situation. One must imagine Europe at the end of 1918 and at the beginning of 1919. Károlyi was unable to save Hungary from being dismembered, not because of "allied unfriendliness," as Congdon suggests, but because Slovaks, Rumanians, and Croats rose against their Magyarizing oppressors. At that time the hopes of a general revolution in Central Europe were by no means merely daydreams of the Soviet leaders. In Germany, the Bavarian Soviet Republic was established by Kurt Eisner in November 1918. The Spartacus movement in Prussia became conspicuous in January of 1919. The possibility of revolution all around seemed real and imminent. Lukács believed in the Communist utopia for the rest of his life and even in his last year defended terrorism and violent repression if it served the ultimate goal, the establishment of the Communist paradise.

Both of these good books merely touch on what seems to me to be the main critical question: Can one speak of two Lukácses and decide which one is better? Or is there such a continuity that one can speak of a logical development? Mary Gluck, in her introduction, votes for two Lukácses, saying, "I do not feel that Marxism was the inevitable or even characteristic culmination of the kind of cultural radicalism that the young Lukács embodied to such a perfect degree before 1918 . . . . My own reading of Lukács' early life and works tends to invest his so-called romantic anticapitalist period before 1918 with far more weight, autonomy, and philosophic seriousness than the Marxist Lukács would have felt warranted or justified." Mr. Congdon seems noncommittal. There is no doubt a real dividing line, established by Lukács's joining the Party. Communism, as he said himself, became his religion and he never renounced his fervent faith despite all the trouble he ran into: the two months in the Lubianka prison in 1941; the troubles with the Hungarian authorities in the 1950s, which became dangerous when Fadejev, the head of the Soviet Writers Union, denounced Lukács in *Pravda*; the deportation to Rumania after the 1956 revolution; and the concerted attacks on his "revisionism" around 1960.

One can argue that Lukács uses even in his later writings the main doctrines of the German classical and romantic critics and gives them a Marxist twist. One can trace anticipations of his later views in his earlier writings. Lukács himself professed to have studied Marx very early and sees the "Marxist trend strongly in the foreground," even in *The History of the Evolution of Modern Drama,* but in the actual text Marx is mentioned only once. Here Lukács asserted rather strangely that Marx's and Stirner's philosophy came from a single source, the philosophy of Fichte. Lukács protested at the time in a letter dated November 1910 against a review which describes him as a Marxist. His immediate sources were obviously Georg Simmel and Werner Sombart. He was surely quite far from Marxism. There is no Marxism in *The Soul and the Forms* or in the two lecture series for Heidelberg: "Philosophie der Kunst" (1912-14) and "Heidelberger Aesthetik" (1916-18).

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Both are strictly within the confines of the neo-Kantianism of his friends and teachers. The second series shows that he had now read and absorbed the early Husserl. *The Theory of the Novel* marks Lukács's conversion to Hegel and thus can be seen as a step toward Marxist dialectics. A whole book by J. M. Bernstein, *The Philosophy of the Novel: Lukács, Marxism and the Dialectics of Form* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984) argues this point elaborately and on the whole convincingly. Thus a reasonable conclusion seems to be that there is an undeniable continuity between the early Lukács and the later, but that still the early works have a distinct character which often is totally at odds with Marxism.

Propertius, our contemporary

Propertius The Poems.
Translated by W. G. Shepherd.
Penguin, 221 pages, $4.95

reviewed by James Gardner

So many centuries and so many revolutions stand between us and the ancient world that in the present age we are apt to cast about restlessly for any spirit of those earlier days who might conveniently be hauled back, like Alcestis or Proserpine, into the light of the living. There are, of course, the perennial classics, the Virgils and the Homers of that time, to be cherished as eternal beacons who have said what will always need to be said. With such as these we may sympathize, but we cannot identify; for there is something about them which, in transcending everything, transcends us as well. Conversely, there are the many lesser poets of that time, like Triphiodorus and Silius Italicus, who, by so thoroughly summing up the fashions and the vanities of their eras, remind us rather unflatteringly of our own, and these we are only too happy to send back into their accustomed oblivion. But there are certain poets who manage to capture something very specific in their age that chimes with something very specific in our own, and this causes us to linger about them rather longer than we do about their contemporaries. Sextus Propertius is one of these poets. For if it was Ovid who found sympathetic readers in the generation of Spencer and Tasso, and the mild Tibullus who struck his Victorian readers as a kind of Keats *avant la lettre,* today it is triumphantly Propertius—together with his near contemporary, Catullus—in whom we find suitable reflections of ourselves.

No doubt it was this sense of contemporaneity in Propertius that induced Penguin Classics to devote to him a brand-new translation by W. G. Shepherd (which appears in this edition with an informative introduction by Betty Radice, the late classical scholar.) But it was Ezra Pound who brought Propertius into the common ken, and insisted upon placing him equal to any of the other elegiac poets, if not to Virgil and Horace themselves. Interestingly enough, the very characteristics of Propertius's poetry that once obscured his reputation have helped to secure his present prestige. For Propertius is generally conceded to have been a difficult poet, and poetry in the modern world is intended to be difficult. Poetry before Romanticism either proceeded in stately fashion from one easily apprehended idea to the next, or moved through a circumscribed number of formulae, or topoi. The poetry of the nineteenth century, however, liberated itself from the artificial constraints of these topoi (even if it lost in structural complexity what it gained in contextual and semantic diversity). In the poetry of modern times, however, there is an apparently inexhaustible appetite for the elliptical, the illogical, and the paradoxical, to the extent that probably no important poet of this century has written more than a handful of poems with the immediate lucidity that was expected in earlier generations.

It was these difficult qualities in the poetry of Propertius that caused Ezra Pound, both in his essay "How to Read" and in the long

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poem "Homage to Sextus Propertius," to see in this poet of the late Republic a mentor and a kindred spirit. The virtue Pound perceived in Propertius (and in one other precedent poet, Jules Laforgue) he called "logopoeia," which he defined as "'the dance of the intellect among words,' that is to say, it employs words not only for their direct meaning, but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its known acceptances, and of ironical play. It holds the aesthetic content which is peculiarly the domain of verbal manifestation, and cannot possibly be contained in plastic or music. It is the latest come, and perhaps most tricky and undependable mode."

With this aesthetic formulation Pound sought to purge his verse of the "melopoeic" (or melodious) effusions of his earlier, Pre-Ralphaelite poetry, as well as of the "phanopoeic" (or imagistic) concision of his slightly later poems. He insisted on an interplay not so much of sounds and striking visual images as of ideas and cultural terms which would collide with, and melt into, one another. According to Pound's reading, Propertius was studiously concerned to work within the poetic tradition but also to subvert it, by parodying the ingrained expectations of his readers, who had been nurtured on the poetry written in Alexandria. There is much to be said for Pound's reading. It is true that Propertius was intensely interested in this Alexandrian tradition, and also true that a rich sense of humor pervades his poetry. Nevertheless, it is virtually impossible to say whether his humor merely takes place within that tradition—showing it to possess a greater elasticity than would otherwise be imagined—or whether it is in fact directed at the tradition itself.

In order to understand the debate that Propertius has occasioned in recent years, concerning the degree and sincerity of his devotion to Alexandrian tradition, it is essential to understand something of the artistic as well as the political atmosphere in which he was writing. Dates are very difficult to ascertain, but it seems probable that Propertius was born in Umbria, rather than in Rome itself, around 50 B.C., and that he stopped writing—and perhaps died—around 15 B.C. His poetry is usually divided into four books, all of which are composed in the same elegiac meter. Their primary theme is the poet's love for Cynthia, an older woman and in all probability a courtesan.

The political and intellectual circumstances in which Propertius wrote were marked by turmoil and uncertainty. It is no exaggeration to say that the dulcet strains of *Cynthia Monobiblos,* his first book, were being composed at the pivotal moment in the history of the world. As Octavius Caesar was struggling to gain his ultimate supremacy over Anthony and the sons of Pompey, Latin poetry was showing signs of similar stress and innovation.

It usually happens that, before great art can be accomplished, the terms in which it will be realized must undergo a considerable evolution. Indeed, the course of Latin poetry suggests a parallel with that of Renaissance painting in the fifteenth century. For surely there had been literature in the Latin language dating from as far back as the Second Punic War at the end of the third century B.C., in the comedies of Plautus and Terence and the epic poetry of Ennius and Livius Andronicus (none of whom, extraordinarily enough, was a native Latin speaker). These may be compared with the "primi lumi" of Florentine painting, Giotto and Duccio. The growth of Latin poetry, however, was not nearly as steady as that of Florentine painting. It would not be for another hundred years—with Lucretius and Catullus in the second quarter of the first century B.C.—that important achievements, comparable with those of the Quattrocento, began to appear. In the next two generations, however, with Virgil and Horace, we witness the full flowering of Latin verse, which finally reached the limpidity and perfection of Raphael in the poetry of Ovid.

The point of this comparison is that even at those moments when Latin poetry was

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creating its greatest masterpieces, it was nevertheless in a process of being born. It was Ovid, like Raphael, who was the first to awaken the artificers of his time out of their archaic slumber, and to provide them with a poetic language, fully realized and free of individual idiosyncrasy, which they could go on to use forever after.

Propertius must be seen as existing at this revolutionary moment in Latin poetry, and as struggling, with his compeers, to determine where he stood with respect to the only other poetry that could be considered as a model, the poetry of Greece during the Hellenistic age. Was he merely to serve as a translator of that poetry into his own language, working within a severely circumscribed set of variations, or was he to forge a trail of his own? It was an essential question, and while it should not be made the central fact of Propertius's existence, as certain scholars have sought to do, still it is a question unmistakably present in almost all of his poetry. The very syllables he uttered were molded to fit the quantitative meters of Greece rather than the accentual forms of his native Saturnian meter, and the majority of the mythological machinery derived from the same source. The specific strophic form he used had been invented in Ionia six hundred years earlier.

The pre-eminent poets of the age were fully aware of their loyalty to Greek models, as well as of their standing at the threshold of inception. Each struggled to carve a niche for himself by introducing into the language some heretofore unknown Greek influence. Virgil looked to Homer as Lucretius had looked to Aratus, and as Horace and Catullus had looked to Sappho and Alcaeus. To whom, then, should Propertius look? In this dilemma, Propertius presages Eliot and Pound, who in the early years of the present century were equally certain that they were embarking on a new course, but who nevertheless wished to establish that course upon an enthusiastic re-working of earlier poets. While Eliot and Pound could turn to Donne, Laforgue, and Propertius himself, the Latin poet had no doubt that his best bet was to go with Callimachus, as he himself triumphantly asserts:

> Callimachi Manes, et Coi sacra Philetae,
> In vestrum, quaeso, me sinite ire nemus.
> Primus ego ingredior puro de fonte sacerdos
> Itala per Graios orgia ferre choros . . . .
>
> Shades of Callimachus, Coan ghosts of Philetas
> It is in your grove I would walk,
> I who come first from the clear font
> Bringing the Grecian orgies into Italy,
> and the dance into Italy . . . .
>
> (Pound's translation)

In Callimachus, Propertius had found a mentor for the sort of poetry he wished to write, a poetry that would eschew the lapidary minuteness of the melic poets whom Catullus and Horace cultivated, and which, although discursive, would not have to commit itself to the lofty and lengthy themes of the epic poets. Herein, however, consists an important difference between Propertius and Pound and Eliot. The American poets essentially sought to substitute one form of lyric poetry for another, even if, in the case of Pound's *Cantos,* the results were at times paradoxically epical. Propertius, however, arrived at his middle course through a conscious rejection of the grander tradition of epic.

Yet the form he arrived at, that of the elegy, would become, in Roman hands, something it never was among the Greeks, namely an extremely subtle and extended examination of personal emotion. It must be stated at the outset that the word "elegy" had nothing of the funereal or "elegiac" sense it usually has today. It referred only to a stanzaic unit, the elegiac distich (comparable to our heroic couplet), which consisted of one line of dactylic hexameter and one line of pentameter. Originally it had been used to articulate a philosophical position, as in Solon and Theognis, or in the slightly more epigrammatic form of Archilochus. In both instances the emphasis was on an almost dry-eyed common sense. In later Alexandrian poetry the elegiac form

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was also used to commemorate the dead, and to give brief and urbane accounts of mythological subjects. Catullus is the only Roman poet to have written much that survives in both the Roman and the Greek forms of the elegy, that is, in the terse, epigrammatic form as well as in the more sustained and impassioned form of the other Roman elegists. The other elegists were Gallus (whose poems have perished completely) and Tibullus, both of whom were born before Propertius, and Ovid, who was born a decade or two afterward and who outlived them all. Each of these poets had his lady, as Propertius had Cynthia, and it was around these beautiful women that they would compose a series of poems, quite like the sonnet sequence of a later age.

Cynthia is central only to the first two books of Propertius. Though he never quite abandons her as a poetical theme, in his later works he becomes more and more experimental and more manifestly concerned with the nature of poetry itself. A Poundian jauntiness, for example, has been found in these lines, in which Propertius, by exaggerating the activities of the poet, would seem to be making light of them:

Sacra facit vates; sint ora faventia sacris,
  Et cadat ante meos icta juvenca focos.
Serta Philetaeis certent Romana corymbis;
  Et Cyrenaeas urna ministret aquas.
Costum molle date et blandi mihi thuris honores;
  Terque focum circa laneus orbis eat.
Spargite me lymphis; carmenque recentibus aris
  Tibia Mygdoniis libet eburna Cadis . . . .

The priest [i.e., the poet] makes sacrifice:
  let quest aid that sacrifice,
And the stricken heifer fall at my altar-fire;
Let the Roman garland vie with Philetas'
  berried ivy,
And the urn supply Cyrenean water;
Give me gentle *costum* and offerings of
  soothing incense,
And let the woollen circlet go thrice about
  the hearth;
Asperge me with fresh water, and by the new-
  built altar let
An ivory pipe libate a strain from Mygdonian
  jars . . . .

(Shepherd's translation)

Similarly, there is a very contemporary feel to Propertius's description of a dream in which he sees his beloved Cynthia drowning and from which he is suddenly awakened:

Sed tibi subsidio delphinum currere vidi,
  Qui (puto) Arioniam vexerat ante lyram.
Jamque ego conabar summo me mittere saxo,
  Cum mihi discussit talia visa metus.

But I saw a dolphin hasten to your assistance,
Who once conveyed, I deem, Arion's lyre:
And I tried myself to leap from a lofty cliff,
When my very terror shattered these visions.

It was such passages as these that most attracted Pound in his "Homage" to the poet, and it is in these that Propertius seems most dramatically our contemporary.

The tone of Propertius, however, is usually quite different from the tone provided by Pound in his imaginative translations. For the Roman poet is above all formal, and usually conscientious about the protocols of the elegiac distich, while Pound's English is jaunty and colloquial. Propertius is, furthermore, a younger and frailer man, one less Titanic in his appetites and less intractable in his anger. Above all, he is not an anti-imperialist and anti-authoritarian, as some would have us think. It was with genuine reverence that he wrote:

Ite, agite, expertae bello date lintea prorae,
  Et solitum armigeri ducite munus equi.
Omina fausta cano. Crassos cladesque piate;
  Ite, et Romanae consulite historiae.
Mars pater, et sacrae fatalia lumina Vestae,
  Ante meos obitus sit, precor, illa dies . . . .

Begin at once: prows proved in war, set your
  sails:
Armour-bearing horses, led on in your usual
  office!

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I sing auspicious omens. Atone for Crassus'
loss!
Go, and take thought for Roman history!
Father Mars and fateful lamps of holy Vesta,
I pray that before my last that day may come
When I see our Caesar's chariots burdened
with booty . . . .

And in his reverent use of mythological allusions, although he is by no means less flamboyantly erudite than Pound, Propertius does not try to shock the reader with untoward juxtapositions, but to lend majesty to his art by recalling the heroic age:

Qualis Theseâ jacuit cedente carinâ
Languida desertis Gnossia litoribus;
Qualis et accubuit primo Cepheïa somno,
Libera jam duris cautibus, Andromede;
Nec minus assiduis Edonis fessa choreis
Qualis in herboso concidit Apidano.
Talis visa mihi mollem spirare quietem
Cynthia, non certis nixa caput manibus . . . .

As on the lonely beach the Cnossian lay
Fainting while Theseus' keel receded;
As Cepheus' Andromeda, freed at last
From the rocks, reclined in her first sleep;
As one exhausted in the relentless Thracian
Ring-dance falls in a heap on Apidanus'
sward,
Just so, it seemed to me, did Cynthia breathe
Soft quietude, head propped on outspread
hands . . . .

This sort of appetite for learned allusion, especially when it is combined with considerable sensitivity to the tenderer emotions of love and jealousy, is surely one of Propertius's most attractive features. In her book on the poet, Margaret Hubbard has drawn significant attention to the role that statuary and painting played in the mind of the poet when he was creating images of this sort, and there is something very beautiful and suggestive in the notion of such sequences of images as constituting a kind of internal gallery of precious mythological artifacts. But it is equally true that Propertius could also feel that he and his beloved Cynthia were actually ennobled by the playing out of these roles, by linking themselves with an elaborate system of mythological parallels and correspondences. Every incident in the life of a man of that time could find its analogue, or example, in some lofty deed of the heroic age or in the mythology of the gods.

If one forgets the original Latin and considers W. G. Shepherd's translations in themselves, one will find that they read quite well as English poems. Shepherd is open about his affection for Pound's reading of Propertius, though he generally restrains the more "logopoeic" elements and is far more faithful to the letter, if not always to the tone, of the original. As will be seen from the excerpts above, he has rather too great a fondness for wandering from the stated course of the iambic pentameter. What is meant to pass as meaningful limbering sounds suspiciously undiciplined, and in seeking to avoid too steady a regularity Shepherd sometimes becomes unmusical. But all in all, the soul of Propertius manages to transpire through the translations. That in itself is worthy of attention, and may work the miracle of moving some intrepid souls to hunt down this rare bird in the original.

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Fiction chronicle

True confessions

by Bruce Bawer

These days, when sampling newly published works of American fiction, one often feels less like a reader than like a psychoanalyst. One feels, in other words, as if one is witnessing a confession of the writer's own personal history—or, at least, some semi-imaginative variation upon it—and is expected to respond with commentary, advice, or words of sympathy. That many of these new works are written in the first person does little to dispel this impression. This is not to suggest that there is anything wrong, per se, with autobiographical fiction. After all, such distinguished works as *Remembrance of Things Past* and *The Sun Also Rises* are heavily autobiographical (and written in the first person, to boot). But these novels represent highly accomplished acts of artistic distancing, of self-objectification; at the end of each of them one feels not merely that one has rummaged around inside a single confused soul, but that one has been vouchsafed an artist's vision of the world.

Many a novel and short-story collection nowadays, by contrast, seems confessional in the worst—the most desperate and claustrophobic—sense of the word. In such a work, the writer's main purpose typically appears to be less artistic than personal: he may seek, variously, to delineate his deepest emotions, to expiate his guilt, to prove his innocence, to account for his failures or weaknesses or neuroses. The real subject of the "fiction," accordingly, consists less often in the events of the narrative themselves than in the protagonist's *feelings* about those events. The most lamentable consequence of this state of affairs is that a comprehensive moral vision often seems wanting; one gathers that, as far as the writer is concerned, the way the protagonist sees things is pretty much the way they are.

It is especially dismaying to find this to be true of literary works that are, in various other respects, extremely impressive. *The Good Mother,* a first novel by Sue Miller (a fortyish writer who has published stories in the *Atlantic, Ploughshares,* and *Mademoiselle*), is a case in point.[1] The novel tells the story of Anna Dunlap, who begins free-associating in the very first sentence: "The post office in East Shelton reminded me of the one in the little town near my grandparents' summer home in Maine." During the first half of the novel, Miller cuts back and forth between the events of Anna's childhood at that summer home and elsewhere, and the aftermath of her relatively recent divorce from her husband Brian, a Boston attorney. The intended connection between these two narrative threads is obvious after the first couple of chapters, even though the whole picture is not. We gather that Anna feels a great deal of remorse over her divorce and, especially, over certain still-undescribed events, involving her four-year-old daughter Molly, that proceeded from it; and we rec-

1 *The Good Mother,* by Sue Miller; Harper & Row, 310 pages, $17.95.

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ognize that Miller is out to convince us that none of these events is, at bottom, entirely Anna's fault—that they are, instead, the consequence of her misguided upbringing.

Miller has, as a matter of fact, got her heroine's entire psychic dilemma figured out. When she was a child, her parents wanted her to be a piano prodigy, but she proved not to be good enough, so they withheld their love and approval from her. The "sense of limitless possibility" that had infused her life at the age of eleven thus quickly evaporated as soon as it became clear that Anna was no Van Cliburn in the making. And her grandparents, unfortunately, were just as cold and distant as her folks. (One would have to hunt far and wide in the annals of world literature to find so extraordinarily unaffectionate a family as the one with which Miller has saddled her heroine.) Because she didn't feel loved, Anna, taking her wanton cousin Babe as a model, became the class Jezebel in junior high school. ("I felt finally that something was being asked of me socially for which I had a gift.") She married Brian, the son of a minister, because he was the first of her several college lovers to take her erotic largesse seriously enough to make the offer. None of those lovers, however, gave her real pleasure—and that included Brian. Being married to him was a bland proposition; he was "in every way peripheral to my life." The essential difference between Anna and Brian, in Miller's eyes, is captured in a brief exchange that takes place on the night they decide to break up. Anna remarks that "sex between us was always so . . . nothing. So terrible." Brian is surprised, stung; "I never thought so," he replies. See the difference? Anna has never had satisfying sex, but *knows* it's out there somewhere, will recognize it when she sees it, and will make the most of it; Brian, on the other hand, doesn't know about it and doesn't care. Even though he's been having an affair with a co-worker named Brenda (whom he marries directly after the divorce), we are meant to understand that this affair is a pallid, predictable little piece of business, that Brenda is a creature of "tidy asexuality," that Brian is not really interested in, or open to, the glorious sensual possibilities of human life.

After parting from this wimpy Establishment husband, Anna meets a soulful, tempestuous painter named Leo Cutter, and becomes his lover. Leo is the diametrical opposite of Brian—he's a free spirit who sleeps on the floor, talks dirty, bathes in a tin washtub, doesn't own a jacket or tie, and collects pornographic pictures. ("Leo was fascinated with the inability of painting, print, to convey a sense of the pornographic in the way photography did, and with what that suggested about the visual imagination.") He's in touch with his body, with the earth—he's *dans la vie*: "Life seemed to reach in and touch Leo in a way it never did me." Leo helps Anna to discover eroticism as a means of communication between two souls, thus restoring to her that "sense of limitless possibility" that she had in childhood. When she becomes pregnant, he leads her to an abortionist and explains to her that the nice social worker who tries to comfort her is "a fascist of the soul"; to Anna, this behavior is indicative not of a deficient sense of responsibility on Leo's part but of an admirable integrity of character. (If any of this sounds familiar, perhaps that's because in many ways it's a replay of *An Unmarried Woman,* with Leo as Alan Bates to Anna's Jill Clayburgh—and with Brian, of course, in the Michael Murphy role.) Alas, Anna and Leo's palace of pleasure comes tumbling down when—well, not to ruin it for anyone—*something happens* and Brian decides it is unsafe for their daughter Molly to remain with Anna. Having had the child with him for a visit, he keeps her and sues for custody; the second half of the novel is concerned with the ensuing legal proceedings.

Let it be said that Miller handles all this marvelously. She is a highly gifted storyteller with a good sense of suspense and structure and pace; her prose, though not particularly distinctive, is smooth and elegant. Indeed, on the technical level this is the most accomplished novel I've read in some time—engaging and consistently believable.

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Yet the confessional quality of *The Good Mother* weakens it considerably. In the latter part of the book, Anna discusses her situation with a psychiatrist (who reassures her that she is a good mother), and then, with the other principals, testifies in court. The "feel" of these episodes is disconcerting; Miller gives the impression that she is pleading her own case, delivering an *apologia pro vita sua.* Her main purpose seems to be to make us believe that Brian is overreacting prudishly, that Anna is the better parent—more loving, more giving—and that Anna and Leo's freewheeling, unsettled life is better for Molly than the wimpish stability of Brenda and Brian's home. And there's the rub. Because this reader, anyway, came away from the book with quite a different view of things—namely, that Anna is simply too confused, too wrapped up in herself and her feelings about Leo, to reasonably assert a greater right to custody of the child. Though she adores Molly, Anna seems less worried about what happened to Molly while in her care, and about how it may have affected the child emotionally, than with the question of how the whole sordid incident reflects on *her.* (Thus the book's title.) And Miller seems to endorse—indeed, to *share*—this view of things. Anna's implicit attitude toward life is that there are only two ways you can go: you can be aloof, like her parents and grandparents and ex-husband, or you can be dissolute, like Aunt Babe and Leo. This is the perspective of a very troubled, mixed-up person, and Miller does little to suggest that her own perspective is significantly broader.

With Linda Collins, too, one receives the impression that one is being asked to play psychoanalyst. Like Miller, Collins is a woman of middle age who is only now bringing out her first book, *Going to See the Leaves.*[2] The stories in this book (which originally appeared in *Commentary, The St. John's Review, The Hudson Review, Mademoiselle,* and *The Kenyon Review*) are preoccupied with the passage of time, the ebbing of life, the fading of love. In every story, her method of treating these themes is to lead one or more members of a sophisticated upper-middle-class Manhattan family through a swarm of natural symbols—water and falling leaves, color and colorlessness, heat and cold, light and dark—that suggest the opposition between life and death. Several of these stories (though the word *meditations* would be equally appropriate for most of them) are delivered in the first person, with a middle-aged woman as narrator; most of the others, though written in the third person, center upon the consciousness of such a woman.

In "When the Pipes Froze," for instance, the narrator recalls the winter day (the second of January, to be specific) when she journeyed with her husband, Richard, to their house in the country, and found it to be ice cold—the heat and electricity had gone off and the pipes had frozen in the walls. They ended up spending the night at the local Howard Johnson's, where they dined on whiskey sours, cherry tomatoes, corn relish, three-bean salad, pickled beets, pimentos, carrot salad, scrod with Newburg sauce, and pumpkin pie; not till the meal was over did Richard realize that "Everything we ate was orange." Get it? Unconsciously, they were reaching out for life after seeing their house transformed into a tomblike symbol of death. This realization prompts our narrator to soliloquize at length upon the days when she and her husband were younger and, like Anna Dunlap, had delusions of limitless possibility, believing foolishly that writing, philosophy, sex, and psychoanalysis would save them from the common end.

A similar woman narrates "Driving Back from the Funeral," in which she and her husband return home across the snow-covered coal country from his brother-in-law's funeral in Harrisburg. At the funeral, she felt that "in the presence of death the little rages of the heart must scatter. Looking at [the body] I thought, We are in death's

2 *Going to See the Leaves,* by Linda Collins; Viking, 197 pages, $15.95.

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presence, and so I resolved to be tender forever. But of its own accord the chatter started again, and I was as before." A near-accident on the highway again reminds her of her mortality and she thinks: "Having given ourselves up for lost, having folded my hands and said, 'Lord, take me,' why not consider the rest of our lives a serendipity, a gift?" She remembers that, at the funeral, she "couldn't look at [the body] enough .... As if there were something to stare down, as if there were something to achieve by this looking, something to win."

In "Meditation on Play, Thoughts on Death," a woman dwells on the fact that her twelve-year-old son, Jacob, doesn't play imaginative childhood games anymore; instead he studies Latin, practices the violin, and plays hockey. She mourns the loss of his childhood—but what concerns her most of all is aging itself, particularly her own. At times, these meditations can be very affecting:

> We all move together in one inexorable swerve toward the end of our lives. We bear to one another different relations. To one, I am mother; to another, child or wife or friend. Some are of my age, we are agemates, and so look the same distance back and see the distance ahead shortening by the same degree; we are bound to one another by virtue of the fact that we stand on parallel rungs of our particular ladders; we understand that what is true for one of us is likely to be true for another, whether or not we dare to touch upon these facts aloud. Then there are those younger than ourselves, our friends whose youth we may envy, pity, despise, depending upon what we think they know about these matters. And then there are our children, whose upward curve warms and chills us, whom we would like to exhort to pleasure and to whom we would call out at the same time, *Memento mori.* No, not that. Surely not that. We would never have them think on death, nor would we have them see how we are ourselves aging, how we are the moribund at the wedding feast. But still we would warn them unbeknownst, so that in the midst of their shouts and games, with cheeks feverish with joy and lips parted to sing, suck, lick, or bite at the apple of life, they should still remember, and prepare, and bear forever the name of their lord and master, death, before their eyes, upon their sleeve.

There are many such moving passages in Collins's stories, and to read any one of them is to be moved to admiration by its style and sensitivity. But to read two or three in succession is to be exasperated by an insistent monomania, often morbid in its tone. The *memento mori* motif is ubiquitous, and after a while the pointed references to darkness, cold, and such are almost comical. In "Driving Back from the Funeral": "Quick winter evening was rushing toward us." In "A Summer's Day": "The thought of time passing confused her. Everything slid away .... She felt she had been wheeled swiftly past the events of her life." In "Meditation on Play, Thoughts on Death": "I am growing old, and I cannot forget for a minute." In "Intimacy": "Soon it will be cold in the kitchen. So the garden will disappear and the window will show only black. Soon, in fact, they will be depressed, night-sad." In "Going to See the Leaves": "The room was cold. She heard the wind and saw that the leaves were still falling in the dark. It was a grave matter that all the leaves were falling, but she was very glad she had come to see them." Certainly death haunts us all, but eventually one wants to know why Collins and her characters seem unable to think of anything else.

The one exception to all this is the first and longest story in the book, "The Doctor's House." There is no upper-middle-class Manhattan family here, no middle-aged woman worrying over her mortality. Rather, this story is a Kafkaesque account of the pregnancy of a high-powered young Manhattan lawyer named Charles Hamilton. Hamilton is not so much astounded by this odd occurrence as he is embarrassed and inconvenienced by it (he has to abandon his practice and his impersonal sex life), and eventually changed: the pregnancy sets his moral priorities in order. But one is not

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sure, in the end, what Collins is getting at in this story. Is it supposed to be funny—the idea being that it would take pregnancy to make a heartless male yuppie change his stripes? Or is it meant to be a celebration of the essential things in life, of the miracle of reproduction and of life itself? If it is meant as celebration, I don't think it succeeds; a woman's pregnancy is one kind of miracle, after all, and a man's quite another. This story is odd in a way that Collins did not intend it to be—odd in the sense of perplexing, strangely incomplete. Indeed, this is an odd book—a collection of truly poignant *pensées* that eventually collapses under the weight of its own obsession.

The funniest sentence of the year may be one that appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*'s "Noted with Pleasure" column on April 20. "Laurie Colwin," it read, "swims against the tide of fashion." Now, there are many things that one can imagine people calling Laurie Colwin, but unfashionable? Never. The author of three novels and two previous collections of short fiction, Colwin has developed in recent years into a touchstone of post-Sixties literary minimalism, becoming, in the process, the idol of a whole generation of writing-workshop students, and (arguably) the reigning monarch of fiction at *The New Yorker,* where four of the eight stories in her new collection, *Another Marvelous Thing,* first appeared.[3] (Others were first published in *Cosmopolitan, New Woman,* and *Playboy.*)

The stories recount the history of a love affair between two married Manhattanites. The middle-aged Francis (Frank) Clemens is an investment consultant; the youngish Josephine (Billy) Delielle is an economic historian. A friend of mine read three of these stories in their original magazine appearances and thought, until she was able to compare the texts word-for-word, that she had actually read the same story three times. I had my doubts about the absolute veracity of this anecdote until I read this book. The first two stories, "My Mistress" and "Frank and Billy," depict the affair in its early stages, relating many of the same episodes and details; the former is told in the first person, from Frank's point of view, the latter in the third person (over Frank's shoulder, as it were). In both stories, Colwin takes us through the tedious business of introducing the principals, filling in their backgrounds, explaining (elaborately) how they got together. There's not much character exploration. The point of the stories, apparently, is to tell us that Frank and Billy met at a party given by the *Journal of American Economic Thought,* to which they are both contributors; that Billy has "lank brown hair" and gray-blue eyes; that she teaches two classes a week at a business school; that Frank calls on Billy wearing a tweed coat; that around the house she wears "a pair of worn corduroy trousers, once green and now no color at all, a gray sweater, an old shirt of her younger brother's which has a frayed collar, and a pair of very old, broken shoes with tassels, the backs of which are held together with electrical tape"; that she uses baby powder and Ivory soap; that she's working on a dissertation about "the effect of the medieval wool trade on a Cotswold village"; that her husband Grey, three years her elder, is "the resident economics genius at a think tank"; that Frank's wife Vera is an interior designer; that one of his sons is a security analyst and the other a journalist; that Frank's apartment is very tastefully decorated; that Billy's apartment on the second floor of a brownstone has "no style whatever"; that Billy sleeps in an old T-shirt of Grey's and buys her white cotton underwear at a five-and-ten; that on a weekend trip to their Vermont love nest they stopped and bought coffee, milk, sugar, cornflakes, bread, butter, cheese, salami, eggs, and tomato soup.

The approach is much the same throughout the book. In "French Movie" Frank and Billy see a movie called *Ghost Dogs from Outer Space.* In "A Little Something" they spend two days together while Vera is away

3 *Another Marvelous Thing,* by Laurie Colwin; Alfred A. Knopf, 130 pages, $13.95.

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on business. In "Swan Song" they keep talking about breaking up but never do. Any one of these stories might easily be confused with any other. The last three stories in the book are more easily distinguished from one another. In "A Country Wedding," Billy and Frank finally break up and at last we meet Grey, who accompanies Billy to her friend Penny's wedding. In "Another Marvelous Thing" Billy spends a couple of days in the hospital and eventually has a baby by Caesarian section. And in "A Couple of Old Flames" Billy, with her nine-month-old son William in a hip sling, runs into Frank at a party given by the *American Economic Review* and they go out for a bite together.

But the book doesn't add up to much. Frank and Billy never take on dimension; nor does their romance. To be sure, part of the purpose of Colwin's flat tone is to suggest that real extramarital love affairs are not romantic and exotic, as in French movies, but trite. ("Isn't it banal?" remarks Billy, apropos their affair, in "Swan Song.") Yet Frank and Billy's affair rings just as false as any French movie romance. Neither of them ever gets excited, cries, loses control; Billy's sardonic tone never falters. Love is a transaction, and a pretty uninteresting one at that: as Billy puts it, "We're in a very unusual situation. It has to do with limited doting, restricted thrall, and situational adoration."

We learn more, in fact, about Grey's résumé, Billy's wardrobe, and the decoration of Frank's apartment than we ever do about our protagonists' motivations. What is the attraction between them? Why is Billy cheating on her charming, handsome, brilliant young husband? How does she feel about being unfaithful to him? We haven't a clue. And the few things that Colwin does tell us about Frank and Billy's feelings don't really *tell* us anything, don't resonate, don't make them grow into flesh-and-blood people in our minds; on the contrary, those cut-and-dried details seem arbitrary, little more than furnishings. Whether the subject is love or the lunch menu, it is discussed in the same terse, precise, emotionless, and matter-of-fact manner: "With the exception of her family, Billy was close only to Grey and Penny Stern. She had never been the subject of anyone's romantic passion. She and Grey, after all, had been fated to marry. She had loved him all her life." So terse, precise, emotionless, and matter-of-fact, indeed, are the stories in this book that they often read less like pieces of fiction than like tidy little business reports or case studies—full of short sentences and objective details and virtually free of metaphor, ambiguity, or anything resembling human emotion.

The Wild Birds: Six Stories of the Port William Membership, a collection of recent short fiction by the novelist, poet, and essayist Wendell Berry, is one of those books that remind one of the real purpose and possibilities of the literary art.[4] "Yes," one says to oneself while reading it, "this is what fiction is all about." The good and simple truth to which each of Berry's stories testifies is that its author observes people carefully, understands them precisely, and cares about them deeply; bombast, pretension, and narcissism are alien to him. He writes about the inhabitants of rural Kentucky, where he has spent most of his life, but his stories bear no resemblance whatsoever to the stylized, anomic rural fiction—the "hick chic," as Diane Johnson dubbed it recently in *The New York Review of Books*—of Bobbie Ann Mason, Anne Tyler, and company. One has the refreshing impression that Berry doesn't give a damn what's in and what's out: he writes what he wants to write. Given the present literary climate, this sort of independence of mind is a considerable achievement in itself.

The stories in this book take place in and around the imaginary village of Port William, Kentucky, over a period of thirty-eight years. The first story, "Thicker than Liquor," is set in 1930; the last, "The Wild Birds," in 1967. (Port William also served as the setting of three previous novels by Berry,

4 *The Wild Birds: Six Stories of the Port William Membership,* by Wendell Berry; North Point Press, 146 pages, $13.95.

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Nathan Coulter, A Place on Earth, and *The Memory of Old Jack.*) The central character in three of these stories is Wheeler Catlett, a lawyer whose conception of the community of Port William as a "membership" is a running theme throughout. "The way we are," a farmer named Burley Coulter explains in the title story, "we are members of each other. All of us. Everything. The difference ain't in who is a member and who is not, but in who knows it and who don't." This is Berry's view of things as well. To his mind, moreover, people have unspoken obligations not only to one another but to the land they share. "The land expects something from us," Wheeler says in "It Wasn't Me." "The line of succession, the true line, is the membership of people who know it does." There's something very American, very nineteenth-century Transcendental, about this formulation; and indeed Berry describes Wheeler in "It Wasn't Me" as "a seer of visions—not the heavenly visions of saints and mystics, but the earthly ones of a mainly practical man who sees the good that has been possible in this world, and, beyond that, the good that is desirable in it." Because they are founded upon the conviction that such things as friendship, honesty, decency, loyalty, and community are important, Berry's stories may strike some readers as "old-fashioned," and it is true that the world of Wendell Berry is, as far as such matters are concerned, utterly antithetical to that imagined by writers like Laurie Colwin, to whose self-centered and superficial urban characters words like *honesty* and *loyalty* are little more than quaint anachronisms.

What distinguishes Berry from the Colwins and Masons, however, is not that his stories are old-fashioned; it's that they're timeless, reflecting an abiding awareness of and respect for the things that endure—or, at least, deserve to. The plots are simple enough. In "Thicker than Liquor," Wheeler (who has been out of law school for four years, and is practicing in Hargrave, the large town nearest Port William) goes up to Louisville to pay the hotel bill of his uncle Peach, an alcoholic, and bring him back home. Uncle Peach is nothing but a nuisance to Catlett, who has had to do this sort of thing many times. When Uncle Peach begins vomiting on the train, Wheeler is disgusted, and cannot figure out why he goes to so much trouble on the man's behalf. "He did not need Uncle Peach, so far as he was aware, for anything—not him nor the likes of him. So far as he was aware, nobody did." But during the buggy ride from the train station to Uncle Peach's place, he realizes otherwise:

> It was a long six miles. Uncle Peach's stomach objected as strenuously to the motion of the buggy as it had to that of the train. He had long ago emptied himself, but the spasms came anyhow, prolonged clenches that left him fighting for balance and breath. And each time, Wheeler had to stop the mare and hold Uncle Peach to keep him from falling out of the buggy.
>
> Finally, after this had happened perhaps half a dozen times, Wheeler, who had remained angry, said, "I hope you puke your damned guts out."
>
> And Uncle Peach, who lay, quaking and white, against the seatback, said "Oh Lord, honey, you can't mean that."
>
> As if his anger had finally stripped all else away, suddenly Wheeler saw Uncle Peach as perhaps Dorie had always seen him—a poor, hurt, weak mortal, twice hurt because he *knew* himself to be hurt and weak and mortal. And then Wheeler knew what he needed from Uncle Peach. He did need to be comforted. That was all. He put his arm around Uncle Peach, then, and patted him as if he were a child. "No," he said. "I don't mean it."

In "It Wasn't Me," the local farmer Old Jack Beechum has died, and his daughter Clara, who is now living in Louisville, comes to claim her inheritance. Wheeler, who was privy to Old Jack's final but unwritten wish—to let his tenants, Elton and Mary Penn, purchase the farm for two hundred dollars an acre—"assume[s] that Clara . . . [will] be bound by it as a matter of course." But Wheeler proves to be mistaken; the world,

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he is reminded, is *not* "ruled by instinctive decency." Clara, no longer a part of the delicate, intricate web of obligations that is Port William, and no longer able to recognize, as her father could, "the irreconcilable division . . . between the things of this world and their value in money," determines to put the farm up at auction. Wheeler does all he can to secure the farm for the Penns, whatever the expense. "The place," he says to Elton, "is not its price. Its price stands for it for just a minute or two while it's bought and sold, and may hang over it a while after that and have an influence on it, but the place has been here since the evening and the morning were the third day. The figures are like us—here and gone."

So important is the land to Berry that at times it seems to surpass people on his list of concerns. People, after all, grow old quickly (Wheeler changes in the blink of an eye, in this slim book, from a young man into an old one) while the land remains. In "The Wild Birds," wherein Wheeler (now in his sixties) is apprised of Burley Coulter's wish to pass his farm on to his needy, illegitimate, and theretofore unacknowledged son, Danny Branch, Wheeler's first instinct is to think of the good of the farm rather than the good of Danny. Wheeler would prefer that the farm go to Burley's nephew Nathan, who doesn't want or need it. "It has been a comfort to Wheeler to think that the Coulter place, past Burley's death, would live on under that name . . . . That is what he longs for, the passing on of the land, in the clear, from love to love, and it is in grief for that loss that he is opposing Burley."

If there is a failing in these stories it is that on occasion they threaten to degenerate into tracts on farm policy. Both "Thicker than Liquor" and "The Wild Birds" were previously published in *Mother Jones,* of all places, and not until the fourth page of "The Wild Birds" can one understand what the editors of that magazine could possibly have seen in these gentle stories about rural life. On that page we find Wheeler writing a speech—for no apparent reason or occasion—in which he wants to clarify "the process by which unbridled economic forces draw life, wealth, and intelligence off the farms and out of the country towns and set them into conflict with their sources. Farm produce leaves the farm to nourish an economy that has thrived by the ruin of land. In this way . . . *price* wars against *value.*" This brief detour is one of the weakest parts of the book.

But *The Wild Birds* is far more memorable for its strong than its weak moments. Among these strong moments are the evocation of old Mat Feltner's last walk through the woods in "The Boundary"; Wheeler's reflections, at the beginning of "The Wild Birds," about the changes that time has wrought in Hargrave; and Andy Catlett's description, in "That Distant Land," of Elton and Nathan and Danny's tobacco cutting: "They drove into the work, maintaining the same pressing rhythm from one end of the row to the other, and yet they worked well, as smoothly and precisely as dancers. To see them moving side by side against the standing crop, leaving it fallen, the field changed, behind them, was maybe like watching Homeric soldiers going into battle. It was momentous and beautiful, and touchingly, touchingly mortal. They were spending themselves as they worked, giving up their time; they would not return by the way they went." *The Wild Birds* makes one feel good about the fate of fiction. It is a lovely book.

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Notebook

Portrait of the artist as Strether

by Louis Auchincloss

In a recent volume of essays, *Fiction and the Figures of Life,* William Gass suggests a difficulty for any biographer of Henry James. It is the possibility that the real psychic dramas in a life so exclusively literary may have lain, not in the events and emotions usually considered as the core of any writer's story, but in his struggle with words. What if James's mysterious accident on the fence in the fire in Newport, or the death of Minnie Temple, or the suicide of Constance Fenimore Woolson, or even the homoerotic friendship with the young Norwegian sculptor were minor episodes compared with his failure to write good plays or with the tortured development of his late style? Might Gass's idea not be the key to a different emphasis in the whole art of literary biography?

Did James perhaps have a sense of this himself? Did he realize that his heart, like his mind, was more dedicated to words than to people? This could explain his belief that a writer should not marry, a theory easily rebutted by the lives of countless authors who managed both to write and to marry well. It might also explain why he embraced his friends, in Gass's phrase, as though he were conferring degrees, why he made near parodies of his grave professions of affection, and why his correspondence is so larded with what he himself called "the mere twaddle of graciousness." He could have been making up for what he recognized as a lack of feeling, or at least a lack of the degree of feeling generally expected.

I can also find in this a clue to James's antagonism toward the idea of any biography of himself, and a clue to the great bonfire that he ultimately made of his private papers and correspondence. But what he did not destroy was the notebooks in which he recorded his relationship with his muse, the one consuming passion of his life. Hear him in 1910, at work on *The Ivory Tower*:

> Thus just these first little wavings of the oh so tremulously passionate little old wand (now!) make for me, I feel, a sort of promise of richness and beauty and variety: a sort of portent of the happy presence of the elements . . . . I seem to emerge from these recent bad days . . . and the prospect clears and flushes, and my poor old blest Genius pats me so admirably and lovingly on the back that I turn, screw round and bend my lips to passionately, in my gratitude, kiss its hand.

He seems to be crooning to the muse that he sometimes addresses as "caro mio"; there is no language quite like it in his fiction or correspondence.

Although James's plots, even in the final phase, tend to verge on the melodramatic, there is one single exception, *The Ambassadors,* where the drama is largely confined to the mind of the reflector of the action: Strether. It occurred to me, after reading Gass's essay, that the character of Strether might have constituted a part of James's

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autobiography, or at least a statement of his artistic credo. Strether, in short, might be the one comment that he felt should be made about his own life as a writer.

Strether is like James in many ways: he is amiable, conservative, with the pleasantest manners in the world and the keenest sense of humor. He radiates kindness to an outward world with which he is never very closely engaged. His wife and "dull" son are long dead, and the latter is more a source of guilt feeling than sorrow—he has not cared enough for the boy. Strether goes to Paris to carry out a mission imposed on him by a woman who is far stronger than he; he accepts the task out of passivity and duty. But once in Paris he discovers . . . well, simply everything: beauty, life, art, all that he has missed in the first fifty-five years of his existence. He is redeemed; he lives at last, but as an artist lives, in his own enlightenment. And nothing else really matters now, not because the affairs of other human beings are not important, but because they do not really want him to be concerned with their affairs. They wish, thank you very much, to take care of their affairs in their own way.

So the whole matter of detaching Chad Newsome from his French mistress and bringing him home to business and domesticity falls of its own weight. It no longer matters what Chad will do, since Chad will do it anyway; but in the meantime Strether has discovered what life—or at least his own life—is all about.

Strether in the end will return to Woolett, Massachusetts, but he will have no more influence on the lives of his friends there than he has had on those of his friends in Paris. Chad will probably marry Mamie Pocock; in any event, he will marry someone very like her. Mrs. Newsome, Chad's mother, will not become Mrs. Strether, but her life will be the same as it was before she considered that alternative. Aided by her nasty daughter, she will preside serenely over the small town's society. And in Paris Madame de Vionnet will be *triste* for a while over the loss of Chad, but she will be French and realistic and adaptable. Poor Maria Gostrey will be the only person to have been permanently affected by Strether, for she has loved him, but she, as James himself once said, is only a *ficelle*—a piece of string to hold the plot together—and how sorely can a *ficelle* suffer? I seem almost to make something out of the fact that only a *ficelle,* i.e., not a real person, could fall in love with James-Strether.

So the only person whose life *will* be changed is Strether himself. He will be a different man, a man with a vision, for his experience has turned him into an artist—after all, he has expressed to himself the whole novel that we have read—and as an artist he will stand apart from the others in a loneliness that presumably has its own compensating ecstasy.

Strether's vision came when he was fifty-five; James's own must have happened much earlier, probably when he gave up Harvard Law School with a deep relief to dedicate himself to letters. But in composing his plan for *The Ambassadors* he could still have identified himself with the non-writing Strether, musing on what might have been his fate in Woolett, possessed of an artist's imagination but of no art, as in *The Jolly Corner* he speculated on the man he might have become had he stayed in New York and gone into business. The early devotion of his own career to the craft of fiction did not exempt him from the trials of other mortals, but his greatest ones would come over the use of words.

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Letters

Peggy Guggenheim

To the Editors:

The history of art collecting in the past five centuries should leave no one bemused as to the sort of individuals who trafficked in the sale and purchase of art. Peggy Guggenheim was no exception; for a relatively small amount of money, she acquired holdings now worth millions. She was not guided in this by either taste or understanding. Some collectors are very lucky; Peggy Guggenheim was one of them.

Hilton Kramer's reflections on Jacqueline Weld's biography, *Peggy: The Wayward Guggenheim,* in your April issue gives the impression that Mrs. Weld does little to evaluate the collection. Quite unfairly, he compares this book with Angelica Rudenstine's *catalogue raisonné,* a work of first-class documentation, a splendid achievement. However, it is to be remembered that the catalogue—meant for scholars, curators, and sophisticated collectors—will not be available (at $85) to the "common reader." Mrs. Weld was fully aware of Mrs. Rudenstine's years of work on the catalogue and was more concerned with describing the personality and activities of a bizarre woman.

Careful reading, however, of Mrs. Weld's biography would indicate that she was cognizant of every item in the collection. She meticulously records every exhibition, from first to last, as well as who and what was in them. She also does away with the hagiography surrounding Peggy Guggenheim. The party-giving, the socializing, the baroque sex life are scrupulously revealed as facts that cannot be brushed aside if one is to understand the manner in which Peggy Guggenheim established many independent artists on the international art map. The collection came together not through her eyes but through her ears. She had the good sense to listen to the best possible advisers, among them Marcel Duchamp, Alfred Barr, Jr., André Breton, Sir Herbert Read, and Howard Putzel. (Mrs. Weld is the first writer to dig up the facts about the last-named adviser, Howard Putzel. It was he who discovered and brought attention to all the major Abstract Expressionists.)

On her own Peggy Guggenheim acquired more than a few third-raters, many bad paintings—most of which have happily been de-acquisitioned. If Mrs. Weld's book seems a bit "sensational" to some critics, it hardly holds a candle to the real promiscuity and monstrous cruelty of this twentieth-century Medusa.

John Bernard Myers
New York City

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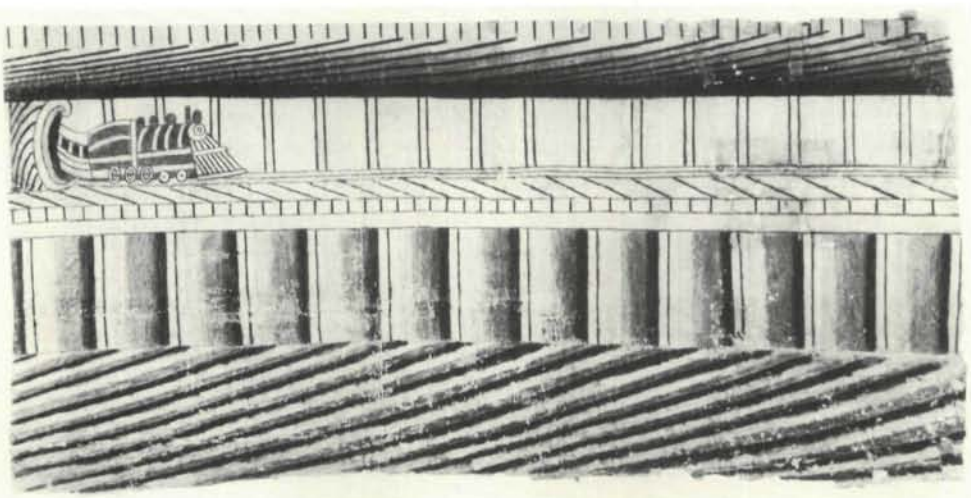

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